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The Nation.

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ITORIAL

LOW IS ALSO BEAUTIFUL

It is a commonplace of the modern world that things move too quickly, events and products and celebrities are hurled at us in such a rapid succession we can scarcely tell one from another.

It was with a sense of particular comfort, then, that we noted it takes all of two weeks for the British naval armada to make the 8,000-mile journey from Portsmouth to the Falklands. This sort of global military confrontation *should* gather itself slowly, *should* proceed at a certain majestic pace.

For one thing, such a speed has allowed both sides to think more calmly. Britain began having some second thoughts about its reactive jingoism, and a number of doves were heard in the press and Parliament after the hawks finished the first chorus. Argentina put it about that it might consider a "Hong Kong solution" or withdraw its army in favor of a token security force.

Best of all—whatever may finally happen—the leisurely pace of confrontation has permitted some real efforts at peacemaking. In the ten days following the Argentine occupation, Secretary of State Haig was able to bounce several times around the Atlantic. The O.A.S. had time for—alas, inconclusive—deliberations, and Peru came forth with a truce plan of its own.

When you're dealing with weeks, there is a chance for calmness, rationality, reasonableness to creep into the awful hecticness of international conflict. When you're dealing with six minutes, no such leisure is afforded. It is not merely the awesome devastation of nuclear warfare that is so terrifying, in other words, but the speed at which it happens—and the inability of anyone to stop and think, much less negotiate.

It is a basic principle of physics that velocity, in effect, increases mass. It also increases danger and instability.

FORGOTTEN ENERGY INVENTIONS
Fred J. Cook
Alexander R. Peters

L.B.J.: WHITE HOUSE WARLORD
Ronnie Dugger

COLOMBIA'S FUTURE
Penny Lernoux

LABOR PAINS
Stanley Aronowitz

NARAYAN'S NEW FICTION
Pico Iyer

A REVOLUTION GOING WRONG

BEHIND THE LIBYAN MYTH

STANLEY REED

The hysteria surrounding Libyan strongman Muammar el-Qaddafi during the last year would have made most Americans think that he was, as *Newsweek* suggested at the height of the excitement, "The Most Dangerous Man in the World." The press attempted to portray him as the key force behind international terrorism—*The New Republic*, with its usual subtlety, dubbed him "The King of Terror"—and the Reagan Administration even put it about that he had sent mysterious "hit squads" into this country to assassinate the President. A presumed threat to world order, he had to be shown what "the shores of Tripoli" is all about, and the United States staged a huge, provocative naval exercise just off the Libyan coast, during which American F-14 fighters shot down two hopelessly outclassed Libyan planes. The State Department ordered the 1,500 Americans living in Libya to leave the country forthwith and subsequently imposed a trade embargo on the Qaddafi regime.

Now that the Administration is preoccupied elsewhere, and finds a Soviet-backed Nicaragua a more convenient scapegoat than a Soviet-backed Libya, the hysteria has died down considerably. It seems an auspicious time to examine the reality behind all the commotion. The American public might be forgiven for retaining the belief that Libya is a powerful and dangerous nation threatening vital American interests in the Mediterranean and Qaddafi a popular and efficient politician leading a successful revolution. The reality is quite different.

Although Qaddafi has spent $12 billion on weapons during the last five years, the Libyan

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LETTERS.

DEFENDING THE REVOLUTION

Cranford, N.J.

I am appalled by your editorial ["Nicaragua's Time of Peril," *The Nation*, March 27] on Nicaragua's declaration of a state of emergency. The Central Intelligence Agency could not have done a better job.

There would be no suspension of civil liberties in Nicaragua for thirty days or even a day were it not for America's brazen effort to overthrow its popularly supported government. Your editorial is thus misdirected. Instead of diverting support from the Sandinists, your wrath should be directed against the war makers in Washington. That would be a wholesome contribution to civil liberties in Nicaragua.

If Allende's Chile had been able to act in a similar fashion, we probably would not have a picture like *Missing* today. By learning nothing from Allende's experience or that of Guatemala, etc., you would condemn Nicaragua to the same fate. For shame.

Is it only the Bourbons "who never learned anything and never forgot anything"?

Herman Lieberman

REPLY

None of us can afford double standards. We target the "war makers in Washington" almost every week. But it is our position that in the long run the erosion of civil liberties can only jeopardize the legitimacy of any government's democratic mandate.

—The Editors

APPEASEMENT'S HISTORY

New Milford, Conn.

Christopher Hitchens, in his illuminating discussion of the semantics of the word *appeasement* ["Words and History," *The Nation*, Feb. 20] writes: "Even after Britain's declaration of war on Germany over Poland, almost half the Conservative members of Parliament voted in a confidence motion to retain Chamberlain as Prime Minister and to reject Winston Churchill." This sentence may mislead some readers, that is if I am correct in supposing that Hitchens refers to the vote that demoted Chamberlain as Prime Minister. That event occurred only after the fall of Norway to the Nazis in 1940, many months after the British declaration of war on Germany over Poland; and it is indeed only too true that even then only a bare majority of Tory members had the courage to vote with the Labor opposition in order to install a new government.

During the months of the "phony war," appeasement, as we still call it, continued to lurk in the background, being considered as a possible option by a segment of the establishment, incredible as this may seem in hindsight. The choice fell upon Churchill, if my memory serves, and therefore upon total defiance of the Nazis, only as a result of pressure from the leaders of the Labor Party. In the intervening years there has been some rewriting of history, which has tended to obscure the decisive role thus played by Labor in Britain's "darkest hour." The reason, I suspect, may be that Labor partisans tend to be men of peace rather than war, and feel no urgent need to keep the record straight.

The decision of Churchill and Roosevelt to demand "unconditional surrender"—a decision which has since invited attack from armchair historians—was motivated at least in part by the desirable policy of leaving the right wing, both in Britian and in America, no room to stand on in dealing with fascism. In the light of present right-wing sympathies for fascist governments in Latin America, guardedly expressed in the United States and Britain but not really equivocal, these memories of the past have some present relevance.

Eric A. Havelock
Sterling Professor Emeritus
Yale University

REMEMBERING NELSON ALGREN

San Jose, Calif.

Malcolm Cowley's moving piece on Nelson Algren ["Nelson Algren's Chicago," *The Nation*, Feb. 20] brought to mind a relevant memory. I think the time was early 1943; certainly the place was Camp Maxey in Texas. A lieutenant in the field artillery, I was approached one day by a somewhat disheveled private, who offered a weak salute and asked if my name was Aptheker. After I confessed to this, he introduced himself as Nelson Algren. I was delighted and suggested we find a place to sit down and talk.

After some small talk Algren rather abruptly came to the point. He had to get out of field artillery. He did not know one end of a gun from another, did not want to know and never would know. It was clear that he was desperate. He did not want to get out of the Army, but he needed to be transferred away from the guns.

I pointed out my own dubious reputation and lowly position but promised to see what I could do. I went to my battalion commander, a fine man named Lt. Col. Theodore Parker (now among the few four-star generals), told him of this encounter, informed him who Algren was (writers meant something to Parker) and conveyed what I felt to be the urgency of Algren's situation. Parker promised to do what he could. Apparently he was able to get Algren away from cannons and into medicine, as Cowley reports that Algren spent three years in the medical corps.

I saw Algren a few times on some later visits to Chicago. He always struck me—as he did on that first meeting—as lonely and rather melancholy, but honest to the core.

Herbert Aptheker

NEWSPAPERS' IGNORED AUDIENCE

New York City

Michael Massing's assessment of the problems of big-city newspapers misses one key point ["Newspapers for the Privileged," *The Nation*, March 21]. Papers like the New York *Daily News* have been so concerned about the loss of white middle-class readers that they never bothered to examine the potential audience that remained. The racial attitudes which lump all minorities with the poor, for example, ignore the emerging black middle class in many major cities.

The most blatant example was the *Tonight* edition of the *News* and its snotty "Manhattan" section. Blacks and Hispanics apparently didn't exist in editor Clay Felker's world. Yet the 1980 census reported that more than 180,000 black families in New York made over $18,000 a year.

The success of magazines like *Essence* (circulation 700,000), *Black Enterprise* (circulation 250,000) and *Elan* has demonstrated the existence of a new, educated class of readers who want to be informed and will pay good money for good publications.

It doesn't take great sensitivity to see that the *Daily News* doesn't want minorities as readers. One recent example: a *Daily News* story on Department of Labor unemployment figures didn't even list the black and Hispanic figures! And in a city with a 50 percent minority population.

Joel P. Dreyfuss
Executive Editor
Black Enterprise

LINGEMAN'S 'CARRIE'

Chapel Hill, N.C.

Very seldom, in my more than fifty years as a subscriber to *The Nation*, have I had a desire to write the editor. I'm not that kind of reader. But the fine article by Richard Lingeman on Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* ["Sister Carrie's Chaperones," July 11-18, 1981] was so interesting and so well done that I want to thank him for it. Having taught *Sister Carrie* for years in various courses at the university here, I imagine I could appreciate the article more than the average reader.

If you look back in the files of *The Nation*, you will find that it was once one of the leading publications for scholarly articles on literature. I wish it might continue that role.

A. C. Howell
Professor Emeritus of English
University of North Carolina

The Nation welcomes letters—typed, double-spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Longer letters may be edited for reasons of space. Our policy is to publish as many letters as space permits, but inevitably a backlog develops, so bear with us.

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EDITORIALS.

Now They Tell Us

We do not wish to seem churlish in questioning the appeal made recently in *Foreign Affairs* by four distinguished statesmen that America pledge itself against the "first use" of nuclear weapons in Europe. But it is of some importance that, in addition to a veteran diplomat like George Kennan, who has been sounding the alarm for some time, the group includes people of the stamp and record of McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, architects of the Vietnam War. If such people are frightened of the nuclear buildup, then it is obvious that powerful evidence against that buildup must be available. What an irony: War Criminals for Peace. Will the next step be Mass Murderers Against the Bomb?

If you read their document, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," you may as well start from the end as from the beginning. The closing sentence reads: "In the age of massive thermonuclear overkill it no longer makes any sense—if it ever did—to hold these weapons for any other purpose than the prevention of their use." *Now* they tell us. Except that, even in admitting that the strategy has been warped all along, the authors perpetuate the basic fallacy of nuclear "deterrence." It is as if the United States originally acquired these weapons to deter nuclear aggression, when in fact ours were the only ones around at the time.

The tough and inescapable fact about nuclear weapons is that if you are not prepared to use them first there is no point in having them at all. Huge and costly systems are cur-

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rently being designed to hit missile silos in the Soviet Union. Does anybody suppose that they are being designed to hit *empty* silos? The entire distinction between aggressive and defensive war is abolished by nuclear weaponry—along with quite a few other things. As McNamara recently admitted to *The Los Angeles Times*, it became clear to the Soviet Union as far back as 1962 that the "first strike" lobby in the United States was getting the upper hand. If we trust his account, he talked Kennedy out of a first-strike posture. So why does he now want "first use" to be repudiated again?

The Soviet Union has repudiated "first use" repeatedly. Yet the Gang of Four talk as if there might be an imminent attack from Russia against Western Europe. It has obviously occurred to them, then, that there might be a gap between what a superpower says and what it means.

This document is a cheap and hasty one and smacks of self-congratulation. Though its authors may be credited with bringing the issue to the front page of *The New York Times*, they have done little more than reach a conclusion that many of us have known for a long time. We would welcome them to the ranks, but as General Haig himself has observed, the hidden implication of their call for sane rhetoric is renewed support for a conventional arms race. The document will not arrest the holocaust, or delay it by one millisecond. The only consolation lies in the thought that, when it does happen, the men who started it, both then and now, will be burned alive as well.

Shuttle Bug

We would do well to start worrying now about the next step in shuttledom, whether or not Haig the Flying Vicar brings peace in our time to the South Atlantic. Peacemaking is an awful temptation to Secretaries of State. It makes them feel even more blessed, politically, than the Bible says they should be for other reasons.

Haig has already outstripped his old boss Kissinger in the game of shuttlecockamamie. At least he's flown farther, faster over the Falkland-Malvinas matter than the great memoirist managed to do altogether in the cases of détente with Russia, the opening to China and the Yom Kippur War. The stakes may be lower but the distances are greater.

The problem will be to slow Haig down. Given that there is no Reagan foreign policy except mindless anti-Communism, the field is wide open for fiddling with "pragmatics" all over the world's lot. That takes shuttle diplomacy, as it's called.

What about some shorter shuttles? Four examples:

§ Guatemala City-San Salvador (to consolidate dictatorships against the left).

§ Taipei-Peking (to leash Chiang Kai-Shek's heirs and set the mainland on the capitalist road).

§ Rabat-Algiers (to suppress Polisario's irredentism and shape up the Mahgreb against the godless ones).

§ Washington-New York (to keep an eye on Jeane Kirkpatrick, who told *The New York Times* last week that she was "just not emotionally invested at all in a relationship with Secretary Haig").

There are other possible flights of the shuttle almost as important as these. What about Washington-Havana? Castro has been making it painfully clear that he's ready to loosen the Moscow string, give or take an embargo. And there's always Washington-Moscow, Kissinger's old route, though that one is more difficult now that Reagan has proclaimed Russia's "superiority" in armed might. Haig couldn't, after all, go there helmet in hand.

The possibilities of this kind of airborne diplomacy are endless. It is an easy substitute for sensible policy, calmly determined and coolly executed. Haig is good at this unserious game.

Campus Police

After trying to intimidate and control the press, the bureaucracy, the Congress and the opposition, it is not so surprising that the Reagan Administration has now gone after the universities. In its most recent onslaught, it has directly threatened to force scholars to trim their academic sails to the government's political winds.

No less a figure than Adm. Bobby R. Inman, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has been trotted forth to warn scientific researchers on campus that they face government controls if they don't reduce the "outflow" of military and technical information that the Russians might make use of. "It is time for the scientific community," he said, "to accept that there is an outflow, and that outflow is potentially damaging."

As if that weren't forceful enough, the Administration fired off a second barrel. Lawrence J. Brady, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for trade administration, told a meeting of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers that "clearly we cannot allow our vital technological lead to be whittled away" by letting academics publish freely. And in one of the more astonishing statements to come from an Administration which, let's face it, has made more than its share, he denounced "a strong belief in the academic community that they have an inherent right to teach, conduct research and develop exchange programs free of government review or oversight."

Strange that the academic community should have fallen prey to such a notion. After all, why should it alone be free of government control? Why shouldn't professors—and, what the hell, might as well include the students too—be subject to lie-detector tests, just like the Pentagon generals? Why shouldn't academics be threatened with jail for publishing unclassified information, just like the naming-of-agents press? Why shouldn't universities operate under restrictive top-secret regulations, just like government agencies?

Of course, there is a case to be made—one which successive Administrations have made—that if universities take a considerable amount of their research money from the government, the government may fairly assert some control

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over how that is to be spent. This is a problem that has plagued universities in recent years, particularly as Federal restrictions have become more onerous, and it is one that is surely bound to grow more severe with the Reaganites in charge.

It is in that light, then, that we pause to extend our congratulations to the administration of Yale University, which last month declined a $30,000 Federal grant because it refused to have the recipient professor account to the government for his time. That may be only a small step, but it seems to us to be pointing in the right direction: toward the insistence, odd as it may be for the Reaganites to understand, that, yes, the academic community can operate—*must* operate—free of government interference.

Mother's Kelpers

Although Britain was quick to respond to Argentina's takeover of the Falkland Islands, it doesn't mean that there is much love lost between the dependency and the mother country. In fact, during the last few years relations between the two have been particularly bitter. Shortly before the Argentine invasion we spent two weeks on the islands and found few there who had anything good to say about their British masters.

The Falklands are among the last vestiges of the British Empire, and the islanders—who call themselves Kelpers, after the extensive kelp beds offshore—were happy to keep it that way. The trouble was that Britain, in the throes of economic hardships and in the light of international opinion against colonialism, wanted to divest itself of the need to defend and support a possession of questionable long-term value 8,000 miles away.

Whitehall didn't say that, naturally. Instead it claimed undeniable legal sovereignty and insisted that the Falklands would remain in its hands until the Kelpers deemed otherwise. But even members of Parliament were distrustful of their government's intentions, as exemplified by the storm surrounding the 1980 House of Commons appearance by Nicholas Ridley, the Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who had just returned from a mission to the Falklands.

Ridley argued that a settlement with Argentina was a political and economic necessity for the Kelpers. "The dispute," he said, "is causing continuing uncertainty, emigration and economic stagnation in the islands." But, he continued amid visible animosity, "the essential elements of any solution would be that it should preserve British administration, law and way of life of the islanders while releasing the potential of the islands' economy and their maritime resources, at present blighted by the dispute."

The protest that followed focused on the implication that Britain couldn't protect its own people—or worse, wouldn't. One member after another rose to protest the idea of the islands stagnating because of Argentine designs, arguing that if Britain had had the will, the Falklands would have been thriving.

Pointing to 1972 and 1974 agreements making the Kelpers dependent upon Argentine fuel and air services, the legislators accused Whitehall of "schemes" aimed at preparing the groundwork for relinquishing sovereignty. They denounced the apparent attempt to create a lease-back arrangement whereby Argentina received title over the Falklands while Britain leased and administered the islands, as it does in Hong Kong. That idea was the least popular with the Kelpers.

By the time Ridley returned to the South Atlantic in November 1980, the Kelpers knew the details of his Commons appearance and were prepared. Instead of accepting the need for an agreement with Argentina, they rejected all proposals and voted to freeze sovereignty negotiations for twenty-five years.

However, it wasn't only Whitehall that had them upset. The Falkland Islands Company (F.I.C.), the largest landowner on the islands (46 percent) and principal force in the economy, was rumored to be pushing for a settlement to protect its interests. Coalite, a London-based energy corporation and owner of F.I.C., was widely believed to be pressuring for an agreement to insure a stake in potential offshore oil reserves.

This was particularly galling to the Kelpers because the overriding fact of the Falklands is that, as a colony, it has been treated from the beginning as a private profit domain by British absentee landlords (including the F.I.C.) who controlled most of the acreage and most of the 660,000 sheep, and who bled the islands financially instead of reinvesting their profits. "The F.I.C. has never reinvested a cent in the Falklands," commented Stuart Wallace, a legislative councilor from Stanley and a representative in the discussions between Britain and Argentina. "They have continually put the squeeze on us to make more money for their shareholders in the U.K."

That squeeze from the F.I.C.—as well as pressure from both Whitehall and Argentina—made it increasingly obvious to the Kelpers that, regardless of who eventually acquired sovereignty, they would be the losers. To many the final nail in the coffin was the passage of Britain's 1981 Nationality Act (which goes into effect next January), prohibiting islanders (and residents of other British dependencies) from becoming citizens in the United Kingdom unless their parents or paternal grandfather were born there. For people who are generations removed from the mother country, but who are nevertheless fiercely proud of their British traditions, this appeared to be the ultimate abandonment.

COVERING THE UNTHINKABLE

Next week, in a special issue on nuclear disarmament and the peace movement, Richard Pollak examines press coverage of the antinuclear movement and the United Nations disarmament sessions; Michael Kazin reports on the growth of the nuclear-freeze campaign; and *The Nation* presents a directory of the important antinuclear organizations.

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A few islanders were prompted to call for independence, wanting as little as possible to do with either England or Argentina. Graham Bound, the 24-year-old editor of one of the two Falkland newspapers, wrote: "Britain does not want us and is going to get rid of us one way or another. There are only two ways they can do this; give us our independence or give us away. Surely the first is the better of the two alternatives." While most Kelpers believe that independence is economically and politically untenable, that editorial did express their shared frustration and served as an index of their unwillingness to bend any further under British pressure. It also may have notified the Argentines that reaching an agreement acceptable to the islanders would require a very long wait.

Ironically, in the wake of the Argentine invasion that forced Britain into steaming off toward what it wanted to avoid, a negotiated settlement may produce what both claimants have been maneuvering in the direction of all along—Argentina would acquire sovereignty in exchange for withdrawing its troops, and Britain would then lease the islands under their own administration for an agreed-upon number of years.

And the Kelpers will continue to be the victims of history.

JAMES EVANS AND JACK EPSTEIN

James Evans and Jack Epstein are correspondents for Pacific News Service and the Toronto Globe and Mail. *Epstein is the author of* Along the Gringo Trail *(And/Or Press).*

'Only 400' Deaths

Reagan's Labor Department recently published a new set of regulations on labeling potentially toxic chemicals in the workplace, which it said would reduce cancer deaths by 4,000 a year. This was immediately challenged by Reagan's Office of Management and Budget, which opposed the regulations because they would prevent "only 400" cancer deaths a year—too few, it claimed, to justify the kind of burden employers and chemical manufacturers would have to shoulder. The workers' "right to know" about toxicity in the workplace, the O.M.B. said sanguinely, "should not be considered a 'right' in isolation from the cost considerations" of the corporations that would have to comply with the regulations.

It's difficult to know how the budget people came up with their ghoulish "cost-benefit" analysis. How much is one life worth, anyway? how much 400? Just what is the cutoff point at which saving lives does become "cost beneficial"? We suppose that 400 lives cannot be considered really significant in the eyes of this Administration—why, that's probably no more than the population of South Succotash—particularly at a time when it is thinking about "winnable" nuclear wars and the deaths of millions. Still, suppose those 400 were Republicans—mightn't that change the calculations?

A happy footnote. The O.M.B. lost this particular skirmish and the Labor Department's regulations will be put into effect. Not because the White House seems to care much about saving 400 lives or even 4,000, but rather because it feared the public relations effect—not to mention the opposition of organized labor—if its cavalier attitude to "only 400" workers got bruited about.

Izzy Says...

Washington, April 14

I must confess I have mixed feelings about the Falkland Islands. Any spark of war on the planet should be stamped out quickly, and I empathize with Secretary Haig's effort to find a face-saving way out for both sides (a diplomatic attempt to square the circle). But I would feel happier if Argentina were forced by world opinion and sanctions to obey the United Nations resolution and peacefully withdraw before negotiations. That would be a victory for world law.

I remember too vividly how world law broke down when the boundaries defined by World War I were undermined by the Japanese seizure of Manchuria and then a few years later by Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland.

Of course the bleak and distant Falklands cannot be compared with such major areas in the heart of Asia and Europe. But it is well to recall that the suicidal Peloponnesian War of the ancient Greek city states, like our World War I, flamed up from areas as peripheral and obscure.

The task of peacemaking is not made easier because in Argentina the renascent opposition, still basically Peronist, is trying to outdo the generals in demagogy instead of arguing the folly of war in a country already reeling under 150 percent inflation. Peron always reminded me of Julius Caesar, another (though more gifted) popular dictator, and the mob so easily mobilized in Buenos Aires reminds me of the Roman proletariat in its light-headedness.

The Middle East worries me even more. In 1979 a crazy Christian fanatic shot up the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Now a crazy American Jewish fanatic has shot up the Dome of the Rock Mosque. These unpredictable incendiary outbursts signal the wisdom of reducing the mortal risk to Israel and the world by restoring East Jerusalem to Moslem responsibility. Is it really too late for an open city—a united municipality but with two boroughs, one the capital of the Jewish state and the other of a Palestinian state—as a cornerstone of reconciliation?

The Palestinian Arabs are rebelling in despair against the threat of national extinction, and the clock ticking in the Middle East ticks for us all.

I. F. STONE

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ARTICLES.

BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP . . . —I

A Rejected 'Coal Reactor'

Amid all the talk about America's failure to match other nations in innovation and creativity, one hears very little about those individuals who have indeed come up with new processes and inventions only to see them suppressed, buried, ignored or otherwise bypassed. In some cases the inventions are opposed by entrenched businesses that feel threatened by the new competition, in others the ignorance or conservatism or cautiousness of businessmen and bureaucrats prevents the necessary funding and development.

We present below the remarkable stories of two such inventions, the maverick scientists who created them and the industrial and governmental establishments that have resisted them. They are particularly important because both, as it happens, have to do with energy—both in fact with the production of energy from coal—and in spite of the present temporary oil glut, the energy crisis is obviously bound to remain with us for decades, perhaps scores of decades, to come. —*The Editors*

FRED J. COOK

The inventive genius of average Americans helped to build the greatest industrial empire in the world and to transform twentieth-century life. The Wright brothers, working in their bicycle shop, produced a crazy flying machine called the aeroplane. Henry Ford with his Model T put America on wheels. Edison, working and sleeping in his Menlo Park laboratory, fathered the age of electricity. A cardinal faith of old-time Americanism, to use a bromide of an earlier age, held that if a man had the genius to build a better and cheaper mousetrap, the world would beat a path to his door. Today it is no longer true.

The lone inventor, whatever his level of genius, is no longer a hero. We have come to rely on industrial giants, with the right financial and political clout, to sponsor innovative research. It is a reliance that involves a basic conflict of interest: what is good for the corporate bottom line may very well not be good for the nation. The maverick inventor who, for example, could solve our energy problems by producing a fuel that might cost half as much as petroleum is not likely to be welcomed by Big Oil and its allies in the Department of Energy. No longer a hero, he is instead an enemy to be fought, ignored, frustrated—and, if possible, discredited and bankrupted.

The Reagan Administration now has before it a case of the lone inventor versus entrenched interests which illustrates this modern reality. The central figure is Dr. Louis Gold, a short, stocky, 63-year-old scientist in Washington, D.C., who has taken out five patents for various components of a device he calls "the coal reactor." It is an invention, he claims, that could at one stroke solve the worst of our energy problems by burning coal—even high-sulphur coal—cleanly and with no emissions, no smokestacks, no costly scrubbers. Four products would be cheaply produced: methane gas for electrical generation; hydrogen gas and carbon dioxide for industrial use; and slag for road-building and construction.

Inventors with such seeming pipe dreams often crawl out of the woodwork in times like these, but there is much evidence that Gold is not one of this irrational breed. He worked on the Manhattan Project, which developed the atom bomb in World War II, and a framed certificate issued by the War Manpower Commission in 1943, now hanging on a wall of his modest Washington apartment, praises him for his scientific contributions. He received his doctorate in metallurgy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1947, and he was part of the team that developed the first American hydrogen bomb. His scientific credentials would seem to be impeccable.

When OPEC began to undo the world's economy during the 1973 oil crisis, Gold turned his attention to the potential uses of America's huge reserves of coal, so vast that they contain more energy than all the petroleum this country has so far produced. But coal has problems. If it is used in electric generating plants, it emits noxious fumes into the atmosphere. The use of low-sulphur coal avoids this difficulty, but even then costly smokestacks and scrubbers have to be installed. And turning coal into gas that can be shipped through a pipeline or liquefying it for use in motor vehicles calls for the expenditure of literally billions of dollars—and the development of technologies years away.

Gold came up with a plan for a radically new reactor for the more efficient use and easier gasification of coal which avoids these problems. It is based on the principles of the blast furnace, but uses a low, squat, rectangular furnace with no stacks, no emissions—and no pollution.

The secret of its pollution-free operation lies in what Gold calls "the chemistry of coupled reactions." By mixing coal with limestone in precise proportions, and then burning the combination at very high temperatures with carefully controlled injections of air, the limestone absorbs the sulphur in the coal before emissions can take place. If steady burning is maintained, the coal gives off gas of pipeline quality. Hydrogen and carbon dioxide (the latter much in demand for quick-freezing) can be siphoned off and stored. A slag residue can be drawn off in a pit at the bottom of the reactor and can be used for concrete-block manufacturing, roadbed building and other construction work, much as the blast-

Fred J. Cook writes frequently for The Nation *on energy issues. The Fund for Investigative Journalism sponsored research for this article.*

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furnace slag produced by the steel industry has been used for years.

Gold's coal reactor has never been built. It exists only in the patents Gold has obtained, but its principles have been supported by a number of reputable scientists. (One of them, Dr. Thomas Reed of the Solar Energy Research Institute in Golden, Colorado, says, "It's one of those things that seems good on paper, but you can't know how it will really work until you build it. At least, give it a try.")

In an effort to get the Federal money he needs, Gold and his Biopolis Corporation of America hired the engineering firm of Henningson, Durham & Richardson to draw up a detailed proposal for consideration by the Department of Energy. The engineering firm, based in Washington, D.C., has done work for virtually every department of the Federal government, has planned some segments of Washington's subway system, and has worked on nuclear power plants and energy and material-recovery facilities in Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa. Its professional expertise is unquestioned.

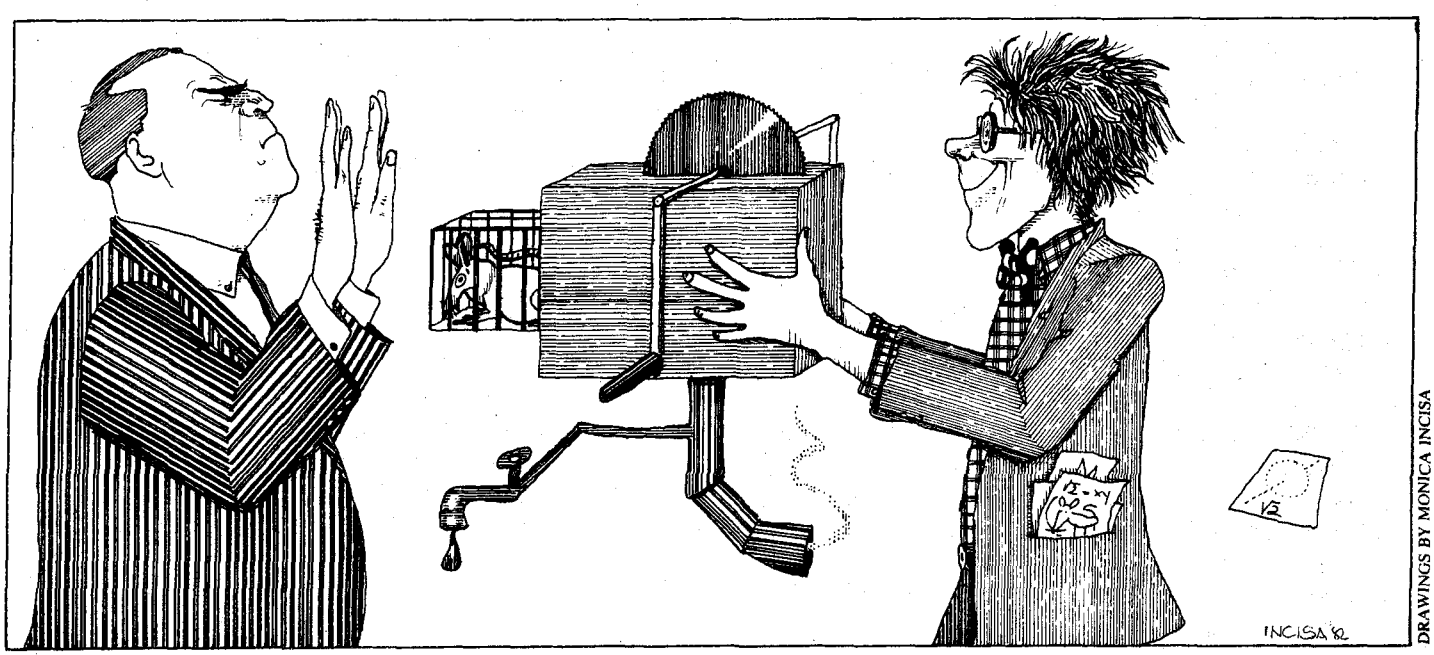
The twenty-page proposal it sent to the Energy Department in 1978 described Gold's coal reactor in detail. It said that a 25-megawatt pilot plant could be built on five acres of land that had access to power, to water and sewage facilities, and to railroad and highway networks. It put the total cost of land acquisition and construction (in 1978 figures) at $3.5 million. It estimated that the operating cost for two years (figuring on 300 days a year) would be $14.63 million. About $18 million in all, a pittance compared with the billions with which the department was prepared to underwrite systems sponsored by huge corporate combines.

Gold's proposal to the D.O.E. was backed by the State of Maryland, which was interested because the coal reactor could also be used to produce methane gas from garbage (after it was sorted to remove metals and other solid rubbish). The proposal also had the support of a panel of thirteen scientists who had volunteered their time to study Gold's system; they came from such prestigious institutions as Johns Hopkins, Harvard, M.I.T., Northeastern and Stevens Institute of Technology.

One of Gold's strongest supporters on the panel was Dr. Ruth H. Aranow, a member of the chemistry department at Johns Hopkins. She points out that prototypes of Gold's system were used in France and Germany in the early nineteenth century. "They produced a lot of clean gas," she says, "but they operated too fast and a lot of particles were left unburned," and a number of noxious gases were emitted. Except for these environmental drawbacks, the old systems "worked very efficiently." What Gold has done, she says, is to refine the process by introducing his concept of "coupled chemical reactions." "In terms of simplicity and efficiency," she has said, "I don't think this process can be beat."

And yet, to date Gold has run into a stone wall in Washington in his attempts to get the coal reactor built and tested. Asked why, Aranow notes that "it could stem from personal hostility"—Gold, acquaintances say, has a sometimes abrasive manner—but she also suggests that "perhaps D.O.E. is deliberately trying to prevent anything that would be really successful."

There can be no question about the hostility in the department. Bob Lopez of radio station WIYY in Baltimore tried in 1979 to uncover the reasons for the roadblock. He questioned Neal P. Cochran, then the department's senior technical adviser, and he recalls now that he was shocked by Cochran's eagerness to attack Gold. Cochran said at first that he had never seen Gold's proposal, yet the Henningson, Durham & Richardson prospectus had been submitted to the department months before. Questioned again about this, Cochran said with brusque contempt that there wasn't enough detail to call it a proposal. He would call it "a preproposal," he said, and he was going to recommend rejection because it didn't contain sufficient information. On the tape Cochran's angry, arrogant voice resounds: "I wouldn't



DRAWINGS BY MONICA INCISA

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call him a 'doctor.' I call him 'Mr.' Gold. Here is just a man who is advancing unsubstantiated claims." Lopez pointed out that Cochran could easily have found out that Gold had his doctorate.

When the Reagan Administration took office, Dr. Adrian D. Sabre of the Institute for Higher Learning Skills in Philadelphia led a second attempt to interest the government in Gold's process. Sabre is quick to point out that he is not a scientist, but he says he has discussed Gold's coal reactor with a number of top-level scientists, and these discussions "convince me that this is an idea that merits development." He wrote Reagan shortly after the Inauguration, asking for "a full, complete and public investigation . . . into the dealings by the Department of Energy under the previous administration relating to Dr. Louis Gold and the Biopolis Corporation of America."

Reagan funneled Sabre's letter to the Energy Department. In reply, Roger W. A. LeGassie, acting assistant secretary for fossil energy, wrote Sabre that because Gold had had many contacts with the department in the past, "it is difficult to know where to start in any review of these activities." He suggested that Sabre furnish him with the complete files. Sabre—who knew that Gold had been told it would cost $14,000 to get his D.O.E. documents copied—replied that it was the duty of the Energy Department "to inquire internally of, and to rectify, matters we both seem to be aware of."

He then wrote again to President Reagan, noting that the development of the Gold reactor did not seem to interest the energy bureaucrats. Their correspondence, he wrote, "says to me (to go straight to the real meaning of it) that they cannot or will not do it, and I believe for this task to be done correctly it will need to be handled at the White House, by a special commission." He asked the President to name such a commission, pointing out that the reactor not only produces "very substantial increases in usable heat energy per ton of coal" but can "handle radioactive and toxic wastes, now such a plague to industry," and might even provide "the handle by which to control many natural and man-made chemical operations which are of large scale."

To date, he has received no reply. "I can only conclude," he says, "that there are certain powerful interests that do not want to see this thing developed. It is not a Department of Energy; it is a Department of No Energy. Millions of dollars are being spent on projects that have no chance of success except to line the pockets of their sponsors. These are projects that, if completed, will be so expensive that they will not reduce prices. It seems that any new development that offers strong prospects of reducing prices will not be funded."

In 1979 the Department of Energy spent $9 billion on contracts for private consultants; it seems strange that it is not willing to risk a few inconsequential millions to find out whether Gold's coal reactor will really unlock the energy future. That is a small price to pay for a device that may be as important to the nation today as were the inventions of the Wrights, Ford and Edison in the past. □

BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP. . . —II

A Long-Lost Synfuels Process

ALEXANDER R. PETERS

In the 1980 M-G-M movie *The Formula*, the major oil companies suppress a secret formula the Nazis used to manufacture a synthetic fuel that was cheaper than oil. Several critics dismissed this as silly anti-business paranoia. In fact, something very like this has actually happened.

The Nazis did have such a process. So did the Japanese and the British. It was developed in the 1920s by the United States Bureau of Mines, and the oil companies have known about it all those decades since. It is used widely today in Britain—the government itself controls a company using the process—and it is mandated for certain "clean-air zones." Yet in spite of the ongoing energy crisis, no oil company in this country has chosen to develop the process or put its products on the market.

The process is low-temperature carbonization, known as L.T.C., and it is a relatively simple means of extracting various byproducts from coal, including oil, gas, smokeless fuel, ammonium sulphate (for fertilizer), cresols and phenols. With technology now known, the L.T.C. process can produce one barrel of oil from a single ton of coal, in addition to 3,500 cubic feet of fuel gas of a quality equal to natural gas and 1,500 pounds of a smokeless fuel that can produce electricity without also producing acid rain. It is also possible, according to L.T.C. experts, to get five barrels of oil from a single ton if you use a special synthesizing process to turn the smokeless fuel into gas and then into liquid.

There are two other methods of getting oil from coal, indirect liquefaction (which turns the coal into gas as an intermediary step) and hydrogenation (which turns it into a liquid and combines it with hydrogen). Both of these processes are complex and expensive, and the latter has never been proved commercially (and is not likely to be unless there is a tremendous increase in oil prices). Both of them—and particularly hydrogenation—are favored by the big oil companies and their willing handmaiden, the Department of Energy.

Of the department's $100 million allocation in fiscal 1982 for oil-from-coal—part of the famous synfuels boondoggle—just over half will be spent on hydrogenation, to which will be added $130 million left over from previous allocations. Blue-sky technologies will get $15.6 million. Indirect

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liquefaction will get $11.5 million. No money will be spent on L.T.C. Ultimately the department wants to launch a multibillion-dollar program to try to make hydrogenation commercially competitive by the end of the century.

The L.T.C. story begins in 1926, when a government engineer named Lewis Karrick and his Bureau of Mines research team told the bureau that they could distill oil from coal in their L.T.C. plant in Colorado more cheaply than it could be extracted from oil wells in that region. The bureau took no notice. Within months the government halted all work at the plant and dismantled it. No explanation was ever given. The Interior Department never published Karrick's original research data, nor did it allow him to write the customary official summary of the technology and economics of his process.

Karrick patented the process, and enough information leaked out about it to draw the interest of Big Oil. In 1928 Dr. Gustav Egloff, director of research for the Universal Oil Products Company, a research and development operation for four of the largest American oil firms, asserted that L.T.C. would be the wave—indeed the panacea—of the future: "There is a crying need for smokeless fuel, particularly in cities. The economic loss due to the smoke nuisance in thickly populated areas is tremendous, there being not only a waste of fuel but also harm from accumulation of sooty material on buildings and personal effects. In addition, the detriment to the physical health and the nerve force of society, due to living in an atmosphere contaminated with smoke, is of no small significance. All these evils would be eliminated by burning the smokeless fuel, oil and gas."

It was no surprise, then, that several oil companies were attracted to the Karrick process. Standard Oil of New Jersey (now Exxon) tried to buy the patents in 1930, sweetening the deal by offering to make Karrick vice president, chief engineer and one-third owner of a new subsidiary company. However, on the same day it made this offer, Standard Oil bought the patents for a hydrogenation process from I. G. Farben for $35 million, and as soon as Karrick realized that Standard Oil was attempting to control the entire oil-from-coal industry, he refused to sell.

Fearful of retaliation, and on the advice of government lawyers, Karrick moved to the University of Utah, and from 1930 to 1938 he was the coal research director there, perfecting and testing his process and publishing his findings. After World War II he was hired by the state of Ohio to test his process on its oil shales, and in 1947 he reported to the Ohio Society of Professional Engineers that "there is enough oil in the oil shales and coals of southeastern Ohio to supply the entire United States with oil for the next 2,000 years." In fact, he said, the state could give away the oil itself and still make money from the byproducts.

By that time the experiences of Germany and Japan in using L.T.C. for synthetic fuels was known to both the industry and the U.S. government. In 1948 the Bureau of Mines put out a report entitled "Low Temperature Carbonization of Coal in Japan" acknowledging the importance of the process during the war: "The production of liquid fuels from coal at a lower cost than that of the other processes was the principal stimulant to a large L.T.C. industry in Japan. For the period 1940-1945, L.T.C. produced seven times as much liquid products as the combined [hydrogenation and indirect liquefaction] industry. During that same period . . . liquid fuels obtained from L.T.C. amounted to 33 percent of that obtained from domestic petroleum." A second report from the Bureau of Mines in 1948, "Some Observations on Coking Practice in Germany," quoted Adolf Thau, one of Hitler's chief synthetic fuels officials: "Compared with the plants for hydrogenation, the apparatus of L.T.C. works is much simpler, and its construction does not call for special materials. Greater independence in the selection of coals, as well as simple apparatus and mode of operation on the L.T.C. process, assures favorable results. Thus all countries, so far as they are in possession of bituminous coal, are now able to produce liquid fuels by low temperature carbonization."

The Bureau of Mines was also informed of the value of L.T.C. in a 1952 speech to its coal research board by

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Dr. Eugene Ayres, director of research for Gulf Oil. Ayres's findings, surprisingly enough, were quite straightforward: "Hydrogenation is too costly in terms of coal and dollars. . . . [It] destroys half the thermal value of coal and wastes a lot of water. . . . L.T.C. is the fuel of the future because of its simple techniques that yielded moderate amounts of oil and high amounts of smokeless fuel. . . . The Karrick process is half as wasteful as [hydrogenation], destroying only half the thermal value of the coal. L.T.C.'s yields of oil, gas, electric power and smokeless fuel approximate the ratio of national demands for these products."

These reports are today in the files of the Department of Energy. They are ignored. When the department is asked about oil-from-coal it waxes enthusiastic about hydrogenation and portrays L.T.C. as a problem-ridden process and a foolish investment.

Perhaps. But it may not be accidental that the big oil companies have chosen to ignore the facts about L.T.C. and opt for the far more expensive processes.

For one thing, the Karrick patents have expired and are now in the public domain. No one owns them, therefore no one can profit from them. David Masselli, a consultant to the synfuels industry, says candidly, "What people like to push are projects whereby, it if works, not only does their first plant make money but everyone who wants to do it has to come to them to license their patents. I doubt that large American corporations would want to put a big R&D effort into something where they didn't control the basic patents."

In addition, since the hydrogenation process is so costly that only the largest corporations can finance the effort, the dominant oil companies are able to keep out smaller competitors and control the synfuels industry. ("Remember," says Masselli, "by definition a cheap synfuels plant costs $2 billion. Once you've completed a cheap synfuels plant you're in the top fifty of the *Fortune* 500.") L.T.C., by contrast, could be undertaken on a fairly modest scale—by a city skyscraper, for example, or an industrial park. Karrick originally envisioned farmers' co-ops and small towns using his processs to be energy self-sufficient; somehow this doesn't fit in with Exxon's plans.

Finally, an expensive process, when it is heavily subsidized by the Federal government, enables the companies that control it to charge higher prices. No individual company could possibly raise enough capital to perfect and develop hydrogenation plants—that's why Standard Oil of New Jersey didn't act on its German patent for fifty years—but Big Oil has been able to get the government to establish the Synthetic Fuels Corporation, the funnel through which $88 billion in public funds is supposed to flow to the industry in the coming years. Even with that massive subsidy, it is now thought that the eventual price of hydrogenated oil will be about twice as much as what OPEC currently charges—not a happy prospect for the citizen who is paying for it all but nothing to cause unhappiness in the corporate board rooms.

Lewis Karrick died in 1962, never having seen the fruition of his vision. The process he perfected is now almost forgotten, and the chances that it will ever be widely adopted—even though cheaper, simpler, safer and more efficient—seem slim indeed. It is not a pretty story—but it is not silly antibusiness paranoia, either. □

'THE POLITICIAN' UP CLOSE

Warlord in The White House

RONNIE DUGGER

At Hiroshima when the first atomic bomb exploded . . . a new era was born—the Atomic Age. The power that ended the world's greatest war within 48 hours became ours to use, either to Christianize the world or pulverize it.

—Lyndon Johnson on the day in 1948 when he announced for the U.S. Senate

Lyndon Johnson was the President, but he was personal. He took you on directly with his thrust, charm, wit, charge and parry, power and menace. He was a force of nature; as Hopkins said of Churchill, "God, what a force that man has." Leading you through the White House as if he owned it, which for his time he did, he cuffed you with his rough anger. He occupied his rocking chair with an indifferent authority, as if, should it squeak, he would maul it. There was threat, ferocity, real danger in him.

"We killed Diem," he said during interviews in 1967 and 1968. But, he told me, we didn't have anybody in Vietnam to take his place, and we'd be a lot better off with him than we are now. Listen, he said, "If Ronnie Dugger's my lawyer, and we've got to kill him, we want to be damn sure we've got another lawyer before we kill him."

From the Oval Office he went into the bathroom adjacent, leaving the door open behind him. Around the corner from me loud expulsive sounds mixed in with his continuous talking. One of his young men squatted down just outside the open door and made notes. Another was hovering around him somewhere inside the bathroom.

Returning, he sat down in front of his telephone console so that he was facing, above the fireplace, the Shoumatoff portrait of one of his teachers, Franklin Roosevelt. Explaining, explaining, explaining the war he was conducting, he compared the Vietnamese people with his grandson, Patrick Lyndon. Extending his right forefinger stiffly in front of him as though a toddler were holding onto it for balance, he notched the air back toward his belly as if he were drawing

Ronnie Dugger is the editor and publisher of The Texas Observer. *This article is excerpted from his forthcoming book,* The Politician, The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson, *© Ronnie Dugger, 1982, with the permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton.*

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the child closer to him, saying, ". . . he takes one step, then another, and then another, but it's slow, it just takes time." Master of a national power greater than any in history, he thought the Vietnamese were children he was teaching.

Upstairs in his bedroom, he sprawled down on a rubbing table and a blank-faced boy, about 18, massaged his gargantuan body with a white oil. Aides brought him reports to read and a new book of his speeches to look at, and from the rubbing table he watched any of the three television screens when something caught his interest. He said again, "We killed Diem," and he said, "We killed Trujillo," and he said, "We were going after Castro." He looked at me sideways with a smile and added, "Us liberals," meaning, of course, the Kennedy liberals. Hoisting himself to a seated position on the massage table, facing me, he continued to challenge me as if daring me with his nakedness, his pot belly, his dangling legs, his power-glowing self. Though I knew he was a country boy, he looked and seemed to be, in these strange moments, a Chinese warlord.

Later on that night I walked the streets of Washington, which are well known to me. Huddled in my overcoat against the cold, looking through the bars of the iron fence at the power-glowing White House, I thought about Johnson in there that night. Half a million Americans were fighting in Vietnam at his command. He personally, at that exact moment which I was also living, could destroy hundreds of millions of people, he personally could destroy human civilization from this venerable old house. With a start I fully believed what before I had only realized: this man I had been watching carefully for a dozen years, increasingly convinced of his desire to do good and his affinity for evil, was the most powerful and the most dangerous ruler until then in history. It seemed to me then, and still does, that the problem for the American people is to realize and believe that this immaculate White House is actually a house wired for universal death, instant after instant, President after President after President. My shoulders stiffening from the cold there in the Washington night, I decided to ask Johnson, at our meeting the next evening, a forbidden question.

In the family dining room in the early evening of December 14, 1967, he was seated at the head of the table, pushed back in his chair, right knee off at an angle, as if we were on a picnic. Two men sat across the table from me, Frank Reynolds of ABC and Tom Johnson, an assistant press secretary, who is now the publisher of *The Los Angeles Times*.

When there was a pause in the talk, I told the President I had been walking around outside there beyond the windows the night before and got to thinking about all those nuclear weapons he, and he alone, had to decide whether to use, thinking about the hundreds of millions of people who would die, how it would be worse for those left living than for those who were killed . . . civilization gone . . .

"I guess you just always believe and hope," he said, "that whoever's here—you know it of yourself, and whoever you're dealing with—can be as candid and prudent and concerned as you. . . . Today we think the Soviets know the awesomeness of it all." The greatest danger was the Middle East, and in a few years from then it would be China, he said, but "we see that the Soviets have come a long way since the bomb, and we think intelligent men are leading 'em maybe," and this might be true of China, too. "Otherwise you're just helpless and throw up your hands."

"But," I asked him, "how do you feel about it?" I was trying to ask him, Would he really drop the bombs? I did ask him, "What are we who are supposed to try to explain such things to the people out there"—I gestured toward the dining room windows and the evening beyond them—"what are we supposed to tell them?" I knew I wasn't putting the question well, I said—

"I know exactly what you're asking," he said. As he thought his eyes were down. We waited. I think a minute passed. The silence was like a presence.

At last, leaning back in his chair, he said it put him in mind of a story he would tell us. One stormy night he was being flown from Mineral Wells, Texas, to Galveston in a small single-motor plane which belonged to a company that was supporting him. He was the only passenger, alone in the plane with the pilot. The wind and the rain were just hell, knocking the frail little craft first one way and then the other, dropping them suddenly in midair, butting them head-on. Suddenly, out the left window, a ball of lightning exploded on the wing.

Well, after they flew on a while, Lyndon asked the pilot, "Is this the company's regular plane?"

"No sir," the pilot told him, "this is just a little plane we use to run errands in."

They bumped on through the violent storm, and then, God *damn!—another* bolt of lightning banged out, dancing lightning balls of fire down the other wing all white-hot sputterin' and snappin' . . . and he decided he would ask the pilot another question.

"Are you the company's regular pilot?"

"No sir," the fellow said, "I'm not. I'm an accountant during the day."

Johnson said he thought then, "Well, Dear Lord, there's not anything I can do about it," and laid his head back on the seat and after a while dozed off.

"When I woke up," he said, "we were on the ground."

That was the President's answer. Maybe when we wake up we'll be on the ground. But he must have felt the horror of the trap he was in, because his gorge rose now against me and my question, against the dissenters, the criticizers, the kibitzers who have none of the burden, none of the inside knowledge and none of the responsibility. Pushed completely back from the table now, glowering at me with his inescapable power for mass nuclear killing fresh in his being and his feelings, he exclaimed that *he* is the one who has to decide whether to bomb, *he* is the one who has to decide whether to send in troops—he shouted at me with a terrible intensity, jamming his thumb down on an imaginary spot in the air beside him, "*I'm* the one who has to *mash* the *button!*"

This is the meaning of the White House. □

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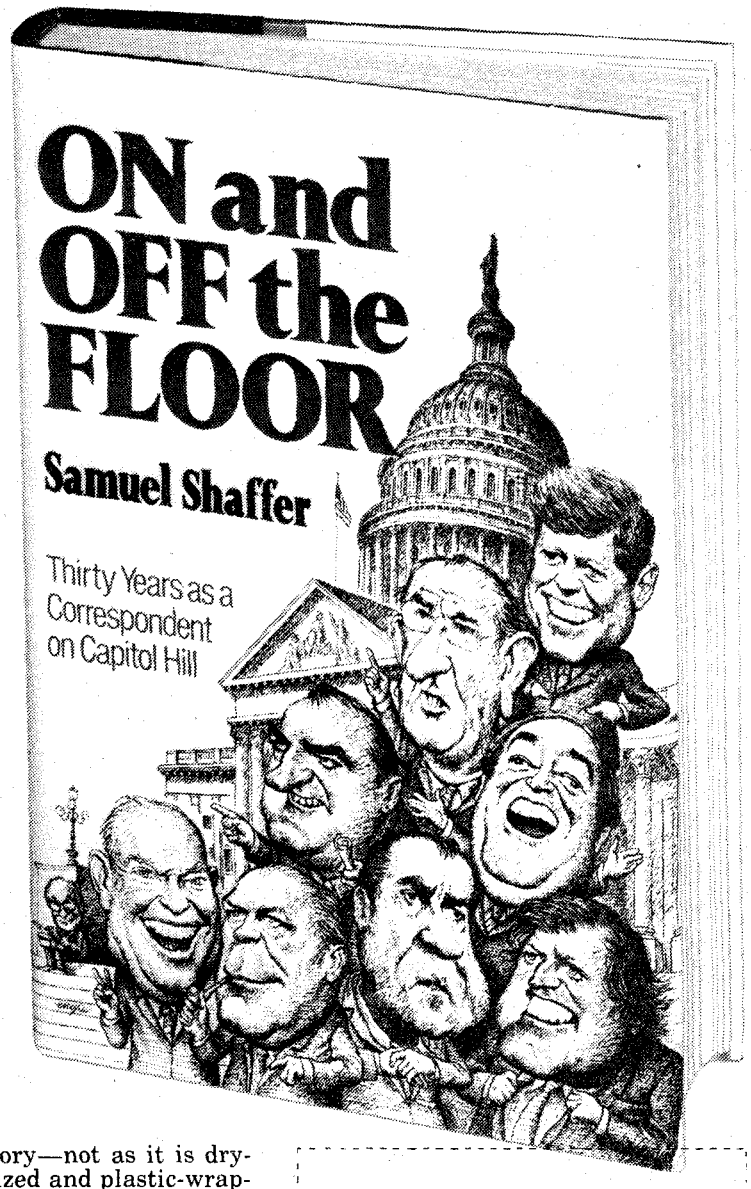

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THREAT TO THE U.S. CONNECTION

Colombia's Future Up for Grabs

PENNY LERNOUX

Bogotá

Washington's new-found enthusiasm for Colombia, around which it is basing much of its hard-line Central American policy these days, may be in for a cold dash of reality if the general prognosis on the upcoming elections in this country holds true. For it is not the Reagan Administration's willing ally, President Julio César Turbay Ayala, who is favored in the May 30 balloting but the far more independent—and far less tractable—former president, Alfonso López Michelsen.

López, the candidate of the majority—though far from unified—Liberal Party, was president of Colombia from 1974 to 1978. Though he came to office with a landslide victory, he lost much of that popular mandate because of his controversial financial measures and his failure to undertake promised social reforms. And, while hardly a radical firebrand, he made some lasting enemies in the Colombian armed forces when he fired a popular general and refused to clamp down on institutions, such as the universities, that the military considered subversive. In foreign affairs, however, his government was more adventurous, re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba and supporting the anti-Somoza forces in Nicaragua. López also refused to bow to U.S. pressure to put Colombia's marijuana-growing regions under military rule.

President Turbay, elected in 1978, has proved to be a much more docile, not to say malleable, politician. Unlike López, he issued tough state-of-seige decrees giving the armed forces sweeping powers to deal with internal security. Yielding to the Carter Administration, he unleashed the military against marijuana traffickers, although the drive failed to dent the drug trade and eventually had to be abandoned. With the advent of the Reagan Administration, much more concerned with Colombia's guerrillas than its smugglers, the armed forces stepped up the war against the country's four rebel groups and soon became involved in Secretary of State Alexander Haig's campaign against Cuba and Nicaragua. Turbay has tended to follow the military's lead, out of either weakness or conviction.

Originally supportive of the Sandinist rebellion in Nicaragua, Bogotá changed political directions in early 1981 when Defense Minister Luis Carlos Camacho Leyva met with Haig and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in Washington. Days before the visit, Colombia suspended diplomatic relations with Cuba, allegedly because it had provided training and arms for the guerrilla movement known as M-19. Well-informed U.S. and Colombian sources in Washington reported that the Reagan Administration had offered Camacho Leyva additional military assistance in return for the publication of a white paper on Cuban intervention in Colombia. While no such paper was forthcoming, the Turbay government's attacks on Cuba and Nicaragua became increasingly bellicose.

The Nicaraguans, incidentally, have also aroused Colombia's ire by insisting on territorial rights to some uninhabited Caribbean cays—Roncador, Quitasueño, Serrana and Serranilla—ceded to Colombia by the United States in 1981. Although the rocks have no value, the surrounding waters may contain petroleum, and the cays could conceivably be of military importance since they lie off the Nicaraguan coast and northeast of the larger Colombian islands of San Andrés and Providencia.

Until last fall, the Reagan Administration treated Colombia as a second-string ally. It was not invited to join the so-called Nassau Group of nations brought together by Washington to deal with the economic and political problems of the Caribbean and Central America, although Colombia is the South American gateway to Central America and has an extensive Caribbean coastline. To add to the insult, Colombia's traditional rival, Venezuela, was included in the group, along with Canada and Mexico. Following Vice President George Bush's visit to Bogotá in November, however, Washington began to reassess Colombia's role. Shortly thereafter, Reagan and the National Security Council approved a "destabilization" plan for Central America and the Caribbean that gave Colombia and Honduras new importance as strategic and political allies.

As proof of its pro-U.S. credentials, the Turbay administration agreed last fall to send 800 troops to the Sinai as part of an international peacekeeping force (the only other Latin American nation to contribute was Uruguay). The decision was not made without some subtle arm-twisting, however. Well-placed sources in Washington say that the State Department told the Colombians that if they did not send troops, the Administration would make no effort to get the Senate to ratify the treaty ceding sovereignty to Colombia over the contested Caribbean cays, which had been pending since 1972. The treaty was saved when Bogotá announced its Sinai contribution.

Washington then responded by asking Colombia to join the Nassau Group. The invitation was immediately accepted by the Turbay administration, which pledged $50 million in aid to the Caribbean and Central America, mostly for educational and technical programs. The Turbay government also is encouraging Colombian banks to expand the network of offshore subsidiaries they have established in Caribbean nations.

A much more controversial Washington connection came to light at about the same time when Pentagon sources leaked a story to *The Washington Post* that the two governments had discussed the possibility of establishing U.S. military bases in Colombia to deal with the Nicaraguan and

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Cuban "threat." Both the Colombian foreign ministry and the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá denied that such negotiations had occurred. But Fernando Gaviria Cadavid, Colombia's ambassador to Washington, admitted that talks could have taken place outside normal diplomatic channels about U.S. financial and technical help in upgrading Colombian airports and harbors in return for permission to use them "in case of emergency." Washington is particularly interested in facilities on San Andrés island, 120 miles east of Nicaragua. It has offered technical assistance for the installation of a radar system on San Andrés, and crew members of the U.S.S. Portland were recently seen taking measurements of the island's wharves and air strip.

Colombia's growing involvement in the Central American imbroglio reflects a sense of urgency on the part of both the State Department and the Colombian military. They fear that their options will be more limited if López becomes president and would like to present him with an irreversible *fait accompli*. That is undoubtedly what lies behind Turbay's recent suggestion of creating an inter-American naval force to patrol the Caribbean. According to his advisers, López will take a more independent stance on Central America and would favor a negotiated agreement among El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba and the United States, with Mexico acting as a go-between. (López performed a similar conciliatory role during the Carter Administration's negotiations with Panama for the new canal treaties.)

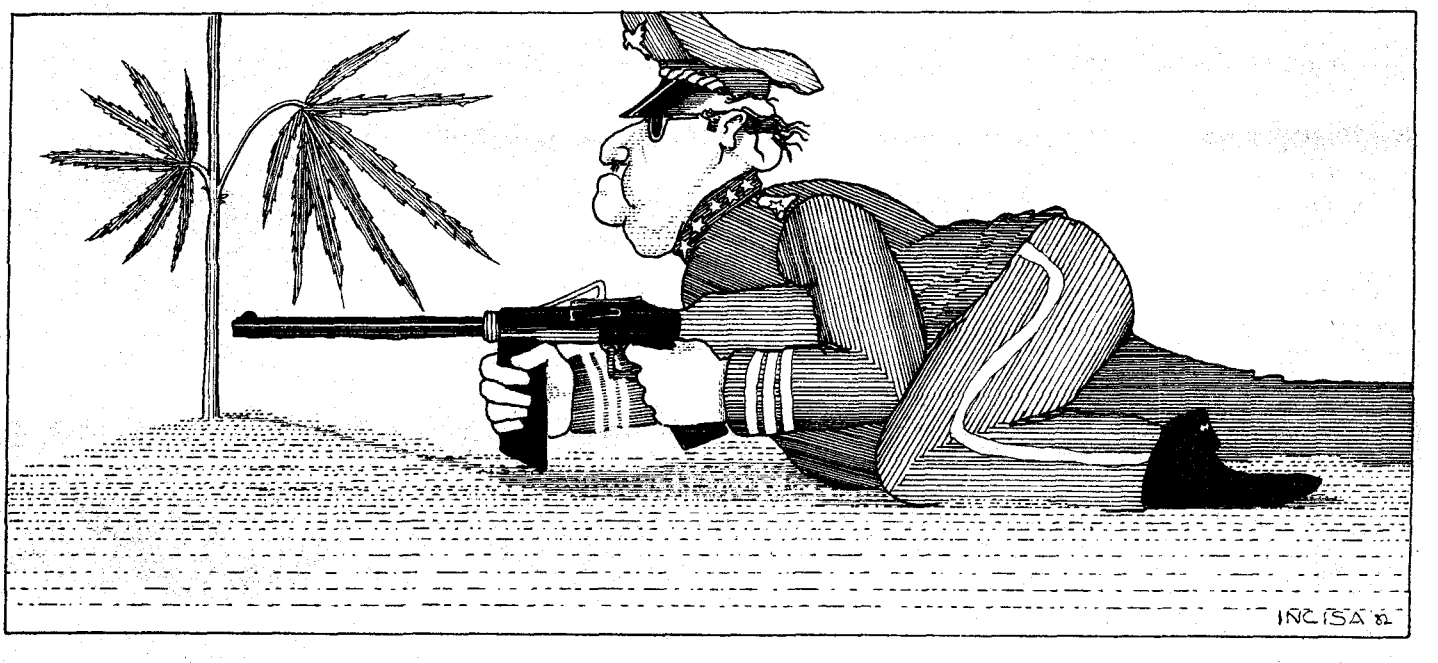
A sense of urgency also may lie behind Turbay's hurried efforts to negotiate a truce with local guerrillas. The army is of course reluctant to have any dealings at all with the rebel leaders, but the generals realize that they would have a much greater say in negotiations under Turbay than under López. López has never subscribed to Washington's theory that it is Cuba that is training and arming Colombian guerrillas, part of its sinister regional designs. Turbay has accepted this line—though no more proof has been offered in Colombia than in El Salvador—and has used it to explain the suspension of relations with Cuba. Lacking such proof, López presumably would not have broken off relations.

López's advisers have suggested that he will be in a better position than Turbay to negotiate with the guerrillas, and they point to the fact that he has gained the support of left-wing novelist Gabriel García Márquez. An outspoken critic of Turbay and the military from his exile in Mexico, García Márquez caused an uproar among the Colombian left by throwing his weight behind López's presidential bid, since most of the left regards López as a front for the country's financial establishment. The novelist apparently shares the opinion of some M-19 leaders that López holds out the only hope for a negotiated peace.

But that hope is tenuous at best. On one hand, López faces a resentful and suspicious military not much inclined to negotiations and allied with an equally hostile Administration in Washington. On the other, he must cope with a guerrilla movement skeptical of deliberations with the government and increasingly audacious in military confrontations and terrorist attacks. While the guerrillas lack any real popular support—the March congressional elections, which nearly crushed the far left, including the Communist Party, showed they cannot win power through the ballot box—they can continue their warfare for some time to come.

If left to itself, Colombia could conceivably muddle through its social and economic problems, which, though serious, do not begin to compare with the difficulties confronting the Central American nations. But Colombia has suffered too much attention from the United States in recent years, and the effects are beginning to show. By forcing the country into its regional scheme of things, Washington has contributed to the growing isolation of the armed forces from Colombia's mainstream political traditions as well as from a majority of the people.

The Carter Administration started the process by insisting that Turbay militarize the Guajira Peninsula in northeastern Colombia, where the marijuana industry is based, although



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everyone—the military included—recognized that drug traffic was primarily a U.S. problem. The militarization proved a useful ploy for Carter, who could show that his government was waging a war on drugs abroad while ignoring the traffic at home. But Colombia paid dearly for Carter's deviousness, including $10 million a year in scarce government funds for the drug campaign and increasing corruption among those charged with stopping the traffic. More important, it led to a significant shift in power to the military, which assumed more and more civilian functions in its expanding war on drugs and subversion. The Reagan Administration has done nothing to discourage this trend—and indeed has contributed to the military's isolation by involving it in Central America.

It is often said in Latin America, even by soldiers themselves involved in coups, that civilian power corrupts the military. Colombia's military has a relatively unblemished record of respect for constitutionally elected governments. Whether that admirable tradition survives depends in large part on who finally prevails—General Haig or Alfonso López. □

THE COMPANIES THEY KEEP

Union Contracts: A 'New Contract'?

STANLEY ARONOWITZ

This spring American labor may seem to be at its lowest point in decades, as the two most powerful unions in the country—the United Automobile Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters—have negotiated contracts with hard-pressed auto and trucking companies providing for a broad range of concessions and give-backs. But the labor movement may also have a unique opportunity to use the upcoming bargaining period to press seriously for more democracy in the workplace in return for its accommodation.

After a long but fruitless round of bargaining with General Motors last year, the U.A.W. moved on to Ford. The number-two auto maker had suffered severe losses during the past year, and the layoffs in some locations had extended even to high-seniority employees. The Ford deal included de facto wage cuts, saving the company an estimated $1 billion, in return for which the company promised to provide half-pay for laid-off workers with fifteen years' seniority, presumably a deterrent to layoffs for older employees. But the union failed to win a reduction of car prices or any significant voice in the company's management. The best part of the agreement was the company's promise to modify its practice of "outsourcing"—buying automobile components from foreign companies or from American companies other than Ford. This concession came on the heels of Ford's announcement that it planned to sell the huge River Rouge steel mill and some of its parts plants.

Using the Ford deal as a model, the U.A.W. then went back to General Motors and worked out a similar contract. Although rank-and-file opposition to concessions had been strong in January, earlier this month G.M. workers voted by a slim majority to accept the new pact, which includes a wage freeze, deferral of some cost-of-living increases and fewer paid days off. In return G.M. offered a guaranteed income for workers laid off after more than ten years, a profit-sharing scheme and "outsourcing" limitations, in addition to a promise to keep open four plants that had been scheduled to close.

In the teamsters' negotiations with long-haul truck companies, the union agreed to a three-year wage freeze and a major concession in work rules. In the previous contract, long-haul companies were required to deposit their cargoes in central terminals and hire local drivers to take the goods to their final destinations; under the new agreement, that requirement was dropped, threatening the jobs of thousands of local drivers. Although the rank and file approved the pact, the margin was fairly narrow and less than half of the 300,000 drivers voted. More than 50,000 long-haul drivers, as well as most of the local drivers, voted against the concessions.

The auto workers and the teamsters have set the pattern for negotiations with other manufacturing and transportation companies for at least the next three years, the period covered by the current contract settlements. Smaller unions dealing with firms in other sectors where there is genuine competition will be obliged to follow the lead of the big two, and this will result in the first wide-ranging wage cuts in American industry since the early years of the Depression.

The difference this time around is that big unions have seized the occasion to make the reductions through orderly and bilateral negotiations. Workers are not being presented with a *fait accompli* by an arbitrary management transferring an economic burden to their shoulders but rather with concessions from the companies worked out by their own unions: assurances of job security for senior employees in the case of the U.A.W., a cost-of-living increase to soften the wage freeze for the teamsters. (The teamsters' union is hoping that reduced labor costs will spur employment, but the relaxation of the central terminal rule might result in even more layoffs, unless the economy recovers faster than any sensible economist expects.)

Radical critics of the labor movement have portrayed these wage cuts and freezes as evidence of a sell-out by union leaders. This high moralism is often shared by sections of the rank and file for whom hard-won economic gains are sacrosanct. Indeed, the case can be made that union members should insist on a decent wage and good working conditions under any circumstances—and if companies can't pay, they should go out of business. But the fact is that the majority of workers do not take this position, whatever its merits. During hard times they choose to accept

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wage cuts in order to hang onto their jobs even if their living standards are reduced.

One of the most important functions of a union is to minimize these concessions when they are forced upon it and to win some countervailing new gains in return. But the Ford and long-haul agreements do not suggest that the unions now are doing much to provide countervailing protection for their members. They have settled for marginal individual protections rather than demanding, for example, a share in the company's power over the work process, market decisions and investment.

These contract settlements may signal a new day for collective bargaining. Some experts claim that the day of adversarial labor relations is over and that unions are now obliged to enter into a partnership with industry. *Business Week* has called it a "new social contract." However, a real new social contract would imply a whole new bargaining structure. Unions might surrender the assumption of automatic wage increases in times of economic hardship in return for corporate concessions, not merely over job security for a fraction of their work force but over union participation in economic decision-making.

If unions won such power, wage concessions might be a price worth paying. Workers could have a voice in determining where companies might invest, thus preventing capital flight; in deciding about layoffs and plant shutdowns; in setting the prices at which their products could be sold. In effect, that new social contract would entail a new relationship of equality between labor and management in some of the country's vital economic decisions.

Right now, the old bargaining framework still exists, even though the particular terms of the agreements may be changing. What unions have failed to grasp is that business, too, is negotiating from a position of weakness. If powerful unions refuse to grant labor-cost reductions, many substantial firms such as Chrysler would almost certainly go out of business. For these corporations, surrendering their managerial prerogatives might be the price of survival. A bold initiative is needed on labor's side to take the progressive giant step toward more democratic work places. The key question is whether the existing leadership of even the most progressive unions such as the U.A.W. possesses the imagination to turn its temporary defeat into that kind of salvation. □

Libyan Myth

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

armed forces are badly trained and worse led and are not in a position to do much damage. Qaddafi's vaunted efforts at subverting his neighbors have produced little real impact except in Chad, which was chaotic even before he began meddling there. And, despite his fondness for anti-American invective, he has rarely harmed U.S. interests beyond allowing a mob to sack the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli. (In fact, he has been so useful to the United States over the years in creating dissension within Arab circles and thus aiding our Israeli friends that the conspiracy-minded argue that he must have C.I.A. backing.)

Internally, Qaddafi's highly idiosyncratic revolution appears to be going badly wrong. Contrary to what one might expect, he even has to worry about his own armed forces. Two weeks after the American show of force in the Mediterranean, Tripoli Radio broadcast what it said was a loyalty oath which cadets had written out in their own blood and presented to Qaddafi at a graduation ceremony at the Libyan military academy. "My master, the leader," they wrote in part. "We hereby pledge to be loyal soldiers. . . . We are prepared to crush any fascist attempt against our leader. We will liquidate reactionary agents wherever they may be."

Apart from illustrating the propaganda value Qaddafi derives from his confrontations with the United States, this incident suggests that disloyalty in the army may be a serious problem. There has been bad blood in the officers corps since 1975, when Omar el Meheishy and Abdel Moneim al Huni, part of the group of twelve officers that overthrew the Libyan monarchy, accepted voluntary exile after losing a power struggle to Qaddafi. Meheishy and al Huni reportedly objected to Qaddafi's increasing authoritarianism and his lavish expenditures on foreign troublemaking. After their departure, Qaddafi ordered the execution of twenty-two other officers who had sided against him. Since then, the influence of regular officers on the government has declined still further.

Though reports of what goes on in Libya are difficult to verify, other signs of popular discontent have surfaced in recent years. In August 1980, a mutiny broke out among troops stationed at Tobruk, forty miles from the Egyptian border. Capt. Idris Shehaibi, described as a friend of Qaddafi's, is said to have either led or attempted to exploit the trouble; according to one version, he invited Qaddafi to visit Tobruk with the intent of ambushing his plane. Then in May 1981, Qaddafi's security men were said to have uncovered another assassination scheme, this one led by soldiers of the Magarha tribe of southern Libya, the tribe to which Qaddafi's perennial sidekick, Abdel Sallam Jallond, also belongs. Finally, U.S. intelligence personnel as well as Libyan sources have reported that last December Qaddafi was fired on and slightly wounded in the shoulder by a Libyan colonel named Khalifa Khadir, who was then shot dead by Qaddafi's bodyguards.

Additional glimpses of discontent in Libya can be obtained from Libyan exiles and their literature. I generally find exile politics pathetic, but the Libyans are worth listening to because they are very recent émigrés and because Qaddafi takes them seriously enough to have had at least twelve of them killed. Flipping through the opposition journals published here and in Western Europe, one can almost smell the hatred of Qaddafi: they depict him as a combination mass murderer and buffoon, a figure vomiting human bones, a hangman, an inarticulate ape-like thug with flies buzzing about his longish hair.

Some of Qaddafi's most vociferous exile enemies are

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students, but several men who once played prominent roles in his regime, including Mahmoud Soleiman Maghreby, Qaddafi's first prime minister, and Mohammed Magaryef, a former auditor general and ambassador to India, are also among his opponents. It is estimated that there are 50,000 Libyan exiles in all, 4,000 in the United States.

The repressive aspects of Qaddafi's regime have drawn the greatest criticism, of course, from the exiles. Mansour Rashid Kikhia spoke for many when he resigned as Libya's representative to the United Nations in 1980, saying that his conscience no longer permitted him to serve a regime "which does not hesitate to carry out the wholesale liquidation of its political opponents [including] some of my best friends and the most capable men Libya has produced." Kikhia, like a number of Libyan intellectuals, worked diligently for Qaddafi for many years, but apparently his allegience ended when two fellow lawyers and co-founders of the Libyan Baath party, Amer Deghayes and Mohammed Forag Hami, were taken from their homes by the security forces in early 1980. They were returned shortly afterward in sealed coffins which their families were instructed not to open.

Qaddafi contends that harsh methods are sometimes necessary to fashion what was only thirty years ago a land of tent dwellers into a modern state. "The cost will run high, sweat will run and perhaps blood will be shed," he predicted in 1975. "It is the law of life, the cost of progress, for the liberation and emancipation we want to attain." The question is, how much progress and emancipation has he brought for the sweat and blood he has extracted?

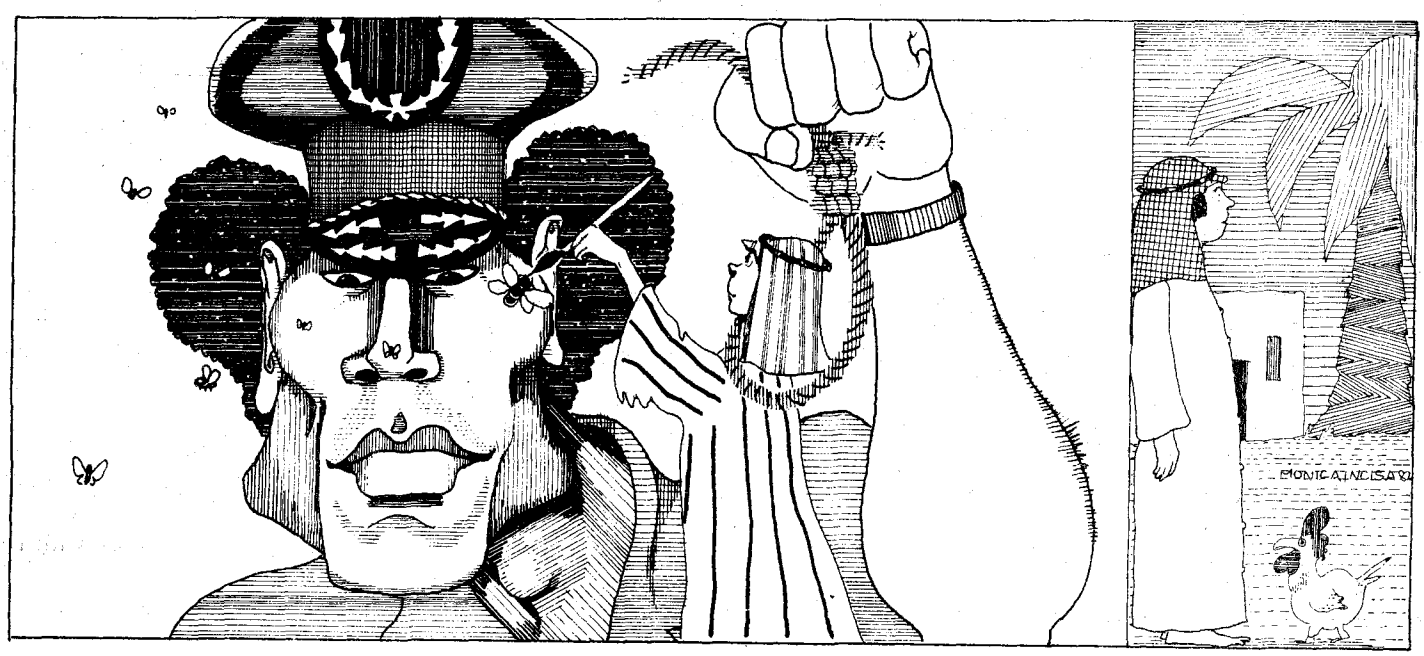
To answer that, it is necessary to remember from what backwardness the country started. It is a place of little historical identity, merely a series of outposts along caravan routes between Egypt to the east and Algeria and Tunisia to the west. It stagnated under the long and brutal colonial rule of the Italians, and at the time of independence in 1951, 90 percent of the people were illiterate and only fourteen Libyans had college degrees.

In the early 1960s a truly revolutionary event occurred: American oil companies began producing petroleum in Libya, the royalties from which quickly destroyed the traditional economy. For the first time there was money for education, and a new class of students, bureaucrats, military officers and businessmen appeared.

Qaddafi, of course, belongs to this new class. The son of a livestock trader, he was born in a Bedouin tent in Sirte, a town just south of the Gulf of Sidra, and educated (modestly by Western standards) at the Libyan military academy. When he and his little circle of junior officers toppled King Idris in 1969, they decided to make a virtue of their humble backgrounds and to seek legitimacy by radically redistributing the nation's wealth and power. The fact that he inherited no entrenched political institutions of significance also worked to his advantage, enabling him to experiment in ways that would have been halted by public outcries almost anywhere else.

In 1973, on the Prophet's birthday, Qaddafi proclaimed a "popular revolution" and issued his three-volume *Green Book* as the outline for this sweeping transformation of Libya. The *Green Book* is written in the simplistic style of a self-appointed genius. It briskly dismisses the experience of the rest of civilization with slogans like "representation is fraud," "the party is the contemporary dictatorship," and "wage-workers are a type of slave." It argues, not without insight, that the parliaments and parties of the West have become so distant from their constituencies that they are no longer the people's servants but their masters. Its "ultimate and final solution" is a system of direct democracy in which the people manage local and national affairs through a network of rigidly egalitarian "people's committees" and "popular congresses."

Qaddafi has gone a long way toward putting this *jamahiriyya*, or "state of the masses," into practice. "People's committees" now run virtually all Libyan institutions, including municipal governments, national ministries and em-



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bassies abroad. In 1980 workplace "people's committees" seized nearly all private firms, and tenants were encouraged to take over their dwelling units from their landlords. At the same time all bills of larger denominations than one dinar ($3.70) were declared void, and within one week everyone had to exchange all their money for a maximum cash refund of 1,000 dinars.

One result has been to bring much of day-to-day life under "popular" control. At least 75 percent of the labor force now works for the public sector. Salaries go directly into state banks, which limit withdrawals to 3,000 dinars a year regardless of deposits. There are very few private shops left, so most money must be spent in giant supermarkets, also run by "people's committees." As these are heavily subsidized, there is no economic hardship beyond distribution snafus, which cause shortages of basic foodstuffs and overstocks of such items as golf clubs.

Another result has been to create a political process which gives large numbers of youths, usually from poor backgrounds, an opportunity to participate. In virtually no other country can men in their 20s and early 30s hope to command sizable military units, administer towns or hold ministry portfolios as consistently as in Libya. This is particularly to Qadaffi's advantage because more than half the Libyan population is under 15 while only about 10 percent is over 50.

Qaddafi has given up all his titles and in theory no longer governs. In practice, however, he has immense power and is answerable to no one. He discusses important issues on television before the popular congresses make decisions on them, calling himself the revolution's "instigator," its guide to purity. Recently he encouraged the formation of "revolutionary committees," composed of the most zealous and doctrinaire youths, to assist him in this role. Their members attended special camps where they received training in propaganda and surveillance techniques. The committees have become particularly influential in the universities, and in the military they effectively outrank regular officers. They have even begun to function as enforcers, with the right to make arrests, hold trials and mete out revolutionary justice; in 1980 they staged televised trials of about 500 businessmen and government officials accused of corruption.

In February 1980 the committees issued a communiqué warning that "physical liquidation is the final stage in the dialectic between the revolution and its enemies when all other means have failed." Two months later, three Libyan youths connected to the London People's Bureau (Embassy) gunned down Mohammed Mustafa Ramadan, a Libyan who worked as a broadcaster for the B.B.C. Arabic Service, as he left a Friday prayer meeting at a London mosque. Ramadan, a Moslem activist, apparently irritated Qaddafi by arguing in a series of open letters and a B.B.C. commentary that there was no basis in Islam for the theories of the *Green Book*.

This killing was by no means atypical. I am convinced that Qaddafi's agents have murdered or executed at least forty people during the last five years, twelve of them Libyan exiles.

In addition to setting up these committees, Qaddafi has put much of his energy in recent years into building a massive security apparatus. Aside from the regular army there are now intelligence agencies, three distinct special forces units and a 45,000-man popular militia. Boys and girls attend school in military uniforms, and the academic year has been cut in half so that they can attend revolutionary summer camps, where they train and study the *Green Book*. Spies and self-righteous "revolutionary committee" members are omnipresent. Residents of Tripoli, for instance, believe that in certain parts of town even their conversations in automobiles are recorded. Recently, committees of revolutionary women known as "The Nuns of the Revolution" have been formed in order to spy on private households and report and criticize any displays of wealth.

Qaddafi's enormous achievements should not be denied. Starting almost from scratch, he has provided the vast majority of Libyans with decent housing and free medical care. He has increased the number of students enrolled in the universities from 3,000 in 1969 to more than 20,000 at present. He has also vastly expanded the primary and secondary school systems, raising the male literacy rate to 77 percent—high for the Arab world.

But these gains are mainly attributable not to Qaddafi or his revolution but to oil income, which rose from $1.2 billion in 1969, when Qaddafi took power, to about $20 billion in 1980. One wonders what will happen when the oil runs out, as it may in the foreseeable future. Libya, unlike Saudi Arabia and Iraq, appears to have passed its peak as a producer; proved reserves, estimated at 23 billion barrels, have declined 14 percent since 1979.

The current oversupply of petroleum in world markets may expose some of Qaddafi's weaknesses. After years of forcing through price increases, Qaddafi is now having a great deal of difficulty selling his oil, particularly because he has been unable to negotiate a satisfactory price agreement with the American companies, which as a result began cutting their Libyan production last July. Libyan production has declined to 600,000 barrels a day from an average of 1.8 million in 1980. The official price has also fallen sharply from a high of $41 a barrel in January 1981 to about $35 after the OPEC price meeting last month. At these rates, Libyan oil income for 1982 will be at best about $7 billion, or over 60 percent less than in 1980.

While the oil glut lasts, Qaddafi will have far less money for foreign adventures, military purchases and extravagant domestic projects. Seven billion dollars will not even cover Libya's customary level of imports—estimated at $9.8 billion, excluding weapons, for 1980. However, this figure could probably be reduced by half without cutting into the flow of food and basic services. The Libyan authorities have already stopped approving new development projects, and there is talk of decreasing the numbers of foreign workers. The question to be answered is whether the chaotic regime Qaddafi has put in place can manage on suddenly limited assets. □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

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PICO IYER

MALGUDI DAYS. *By R. K. Narayan. The Viking Press. 246 pp. $14.95.*

R. K. Narayan is India's literary grandfather—and has been since his youth. Toward his country and his ragamuffin heroes he is engagingly amused and indulgent; within their weaknesses, he reveals their strengths. Visiting writers (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Paul Scott and E.M. Forster) have earnestly expressed their bewilderment with India without ever making their peace with it; those a little closer to the country (V.S. Naipaul, say, or Salman Rushdie) have interpreted it to the West, yet have in the process forsaken the East. Narayan, however, neither analyzes nor mythicizes; he stays at home and simply, serenely, documents the vagaries of a fictional, but typical, small town (Malgudi). Where Naipaul addresses the mind and Rushdie takes off on his imagination, Narayan returns always to the heart. And where Rushdie and others have suggested that the ancient land of fantastical legend is being transformed into an urban and relentlessly utilitarian dictatorship, Narayan's characters are, happily, too removed to notice such developments.

It is fitting, then, that Narayan's new volume of stories, *Malgudi Days*, bears the same title as his first collection, published in India forty years ago. For their substance changes as rarely as their subjects: Narayan neither attempts what he can't do nor elevates what he can. Instead, likening himself to a village storyteller and relying only on a trained eye, ear and heart, he continues as chronicler (and caretaker) of ageless rhythms and enduring problems. Almost all his short, swift tales describe small men confronting demands larger than themselves. To these overwrought situations, Narayan brings an understated touch and a wry, observant and forgiving style discreet enough to dazzle other writers. (Graham Greene calls him the greatest prose writer since Waugh, and John Updike likens him to Dickens.) In short, Narayan takes the India of fantasy and tradition—a place of astrologers and arranged marriages, of tigers and gods—and brings it gently down to earth.

Narayan's characters remain utterly uncontaminated by public and political realities. Indira Gandhi and a solitary hippie appear in two recent stories, and in another one a simple old man is forcibly sterilized, but most of the stories examine private rituals and domestic riddles, confrontations between men and slippery circumstances. The crackle and static of Indian life hum in the background but, ultimately, Narayan talks through his people; he speaks in their (pungent, slightly askew) English cadences and communicates through their unexceptional actions and aches.

Narayan is comfortable with the feelings of his characters and the logic of their destinies. He likes—and trusts—the good-for-nothings who unexpectedly become his heroes; and yet, as a faithful Hindu, he accepts the caprices of the gods, whose sense of irony seems as refined and impish as his own. Some of his characters sustain themselves with guilt and kill themselves with joy; others are cursed for kindness and rewarded for chicanery; still others come to lament their triumphs. Nothing—and nobody—works as expected.

In this ironic world, burglars stop to pet dogs and tricksters lie, only to find their fictions come true. A typical story describes a doctor faced with the imminent death of his best friend. He allows affection to compromise authority, deceitfully assures the patient that he'll live and, through willpower alone, saves his companion. Elsewhere, a thief steals a purse containing a balloon meant for a motherless child. Crooked enough to keep the cash but not cruel enough to disappoint the child, he tries to slip the wallet back into its owner's pocket and is promptly caught.

Westerners tend to imagine India as teeming with otherworldly saints and underworld sinners, while Narayan realizes that these are not necessarily different sorts of people. Gita Mehta and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala scorn Californian seekers and fraudulent gurus alike, but in Narayan's world, when a hippie questions a village cobbler, each, graced with a credulous innocence, takes the other for a god. The typical Narayan hero is a luckless but affable con man who inspires confidence and finally, to his surprise (and ours), deserves it, or a cunning fellow who grows desperate and finds in that desperation a sudden, transporting nobility. Such is Narayan's tenderness toward these people that their peccadilloes become as appealing as their improbable acts of heroism. None seem irredeemable.

So, too, Narayan suggests that India's fatal flaws—its inefficiency, indolence and superstition—are, perversely, its saving grace. The Malgudi mailman takes so long to deliver letters because he also dispenses advice; emotional loss may accompany practical gain; and schemers, if taken as saints, may become saviors in spite of themselves.

His kindly tolerance notwithstanding, Narayan himself is also an artful dodger, a literary pickpocket whose puzzled shrewdness teases his readers and craftily evades his admirers (his memoir about being feted in America is called *The Reluctant Guru*). His fabled artistic innocence is at once studied and sincere. He includes in his books detailed maps, then whispers to readers that Malgudi is very near New York's Chelsea Hotel; he is compared with Faulkner and Chekhov, yet ventures few literary precepts more daring than that "a short story must be short."

Modern India has yet to find a literary voice for the new political identity it seeks. The most likely candidate (and the first novel to fashion out of India a modernist narrative as grand and gaudy and grotesque as its subject) is Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. At 34, Rushdie did for his homeland what García Márquez did for Colombia and Whitman for America: he wrote a book of a myriad voices, as loquacious and fabulous and extreme as the Indian temperament, a book that gathered up all the land's incarnations and contrarieties and chose as its hero the newborn nation itself. Rushdie's cacophonous marvel catches the clamor, the claustrophobia of contemporary India. It reeks of the earthy streets and their spiced complications; it gives expression to the crowded, swelling, turbulent, post-independence cities. But of the old-fashioned, rather amiable rural heartland, the acknowledged laureate is still Narayan. □

Pico Iyer teaches English at Harvard.

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A New 'Gospel of Wealth'

JOHN SCHAAR

THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM. *By Michael Novak. American Enterprise Institute/Simon and Schuster. 432 pp. $16.50.*

Some time back Michael Novak left his chair in religious studies at Syracuse University and joined the "extraordinary fraternity of the American Enterprise Institute." Since then, it has been all enlightenment and progressive discovery of the truth. The new vision is now complete, and this book reports the glad tidings.

The new vision, in a word, is that "democratic capitalism" is the best thing going. Not only does it beat socialism hands down, but it is acceptable in the eyes of the divinity: "God has called for individuals and peoples to live according to His law and inspiration. Democratic capitalism has been designed to permit them, sinners all, to follow this free pattern." Nor is that all. Democratic capitalism is also the best hope that suffering humanity has for achieving liberty and justice, good race relations, prosperity, trust, the rule of law, happy families and healthy churches.

This new rose of Sharon is wholly fair and comely. What others might call blemishes are in Novak's eyes (eyes no longer fogged by nostalgia and bad Catholic social doctrine) beauty marks. This book turns theology into cosmetology—or, in plainer language, whitewash. This book belongs in "The Gospel of Wealth" tradition of the late nineteenth century. Like Andrew Carnegie's 1889 tract of that title, it finds capitalism in accord with God's will, natural law, human nature and democracy. I must add that while *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* is reminiscent of "The Gospel of Wealth," it is inferior in quality: Novak is scattered and prolix, mixing cheap piety with superficial history and sloppy statistics; he lacks Carnegie's vigor and directness; his tone is less revelatory and commanding than whiny and sanctimonious.

The method of the book is simplicity itself. It consists, first, in comparing the "ideal" of democratic capitalism (political democracy, cultural pluralism, free markets) with the "reality" of socialism (repression, bureaucracy, low productivity). Second, the author ascribes all good things (prosperity, longevity, freedom, scientific and technological process) to democratic capitalism, and then sets these achievements alongside the miserable failures of all else, from traditional cultures through feudalism and the medieval church and on to socialism and liberation theology. Capitalism wins every round.

The method is shown to perfection in the book's brief opening section, titled "The Historical Achievements of Democratic Capitalism." Here we are told that "after five millennia of blundering, human beings finally figured out how wealth may be produced in a sustained, systematic way." The great invention was the market economy, which the author dates at 1800. Before that, all was darkness: famine and plague; grinding poverty; virtually universal illiteracy; misery and stagnation. We learn in this section that "in Africa, the wheel had never been invented"; that in the 1780s "four-fifths of French families devoted 90 percent of their incomes simply to buying bread—only bread—to stay alive"; and that in 1800 "in the whole of Germany fewer than a thousand people had incomes as high as $1,000." We also learn that "the natural logic of capitalism leads to democracy." Countries that seem to violate this logic—say, Chile, Brazil, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea and formerly fascist Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece—are dismissed as "not fully formed examples of democratic capitalism." We are later informed of the mind-expanding news that "Western civilization is possible because it has triumphed over envy."

These statements are typical of what passes for history, economics and cultural analysis in this book. □

John Schaar is the author of Escape From Authority *(Basic Books) and of* Legitimacy and the Modern State *(Transaction Books). He teaches politics at the University of California at Santa Cruz.*

Mind Games

BRINA CAPLAN

THE REBEL ANGELS. *By Robertson Davies. The Viking Press. 326 pp. $13.95.*

TAKING CARE. *By Joy Williams. Random House. 246 pp. $12.50.*

Committed to a long-term lease on an utterly dismal piece of real estate, John Milton's Satan consoles himself by reasoning that "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n." Of course *Paradise Lost* hardly recommends this sort of mental revision—both the place and Satan himself continue to feel like hell throughout the poem. Yet to give the devil his due, his method of improving an unpleasant situation lives on in most of us. Perhaps there are only two psychological strategies for combating a discomforting world: either the mind reasons through its environment, discovering laws that allow comprehension, prediction and control, or, like Satan's, it reasons against its environment, disregarding an impossible reality in order to imagine something more satisfactory.

In the ordinary muddle of our lives, we may switch many times a day from one strategy to the other, unaware that we have changed the nature of our thinking. But how we think becomes what we think, as indicated by the antagonistic perspectives of Robertson Davies's seventh novel, *The Rebel Angels*, and Joy Williams's first collection of short stories, *Taking Care*. Although neither of these books is entirely successful in itself, together they suggest an important opposition; the distance that separates their visions of the world also separates meaning from its abandonment, control from helplessness and hope from despair.

Of the two outlooks, Davies's is the cheerier. *The Rebel Angels* takes place in the College of St. John and the Holy Ghost—called "Spook" by its residents—at a Toronto university. His central characters are scholars, twentieth-century discoverers whose way of life confirms traditions continuous since the Middle Ages. Scholars have always led brazenly adventurous mental lives, Davies reminds us, at the same time as they have secured their less than audacious selves within the protec-

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tive walls of the university. As a result, while Western culture preserves their findings, the curious subculture of university life preserves their cast of mind, their quirks and whimseys. "'Quite extraordinary,'" muses a professor of English during a Senior Common Room dinner, "'what charity universities extend toward people who have known the great'":

> "Any wandering Englishman who remembers Virginia Woolf, or Wyndham Lewis, or E.M. Forster can pick up a fee and eat and drink himself paralytic in any university on this continent. Medieval, really; taking in jugglers and sword-swallowers who are on the tramp."

Though delighting in the fustiness of professorial ways, *The Rebel Angels* outright mocks more spiteful or pretentious academic behavior. A maliciously competitive historian, for example, is revealed to have retouched a portrait of Sir Thomas Urquart—the first English translator of Rabelais and the historian's putative ancestor—to establish the family resemblance. This Urquart McVarish, it later turns out, also indulges in nasty sexual practices that bring him at last to a grotesque, morally suitable end.

Clearly enough, Davies intends his social comedy to instruct as well as to delight. Although he offers an old-fashioned, even Tory, morality, it remains quite palatable as long as the characters themselves serve it up through their development and interplay. But all too frequently, Davies simply uses them to lecture at us. At such moments, his instruction takes on the dry, chalky flavor of the classroom: "'The desire to find out, to uncover, to dig deeper, to puzzle out obscurities, is the spirit of the university,'" Simon Darcourt, a scholar-priest, asserts, "'and it is a channelling of that unresting curiosity that holds mankind together.'" Perhaps, but resorting to a pointer and blackboard is a less than gracious means of demonstration.

In his eagerness to compel belief, Davies also tends to freeze his characters in morally significant tableaux—stagy arrangements that suggest *Faust* or the fateful nibble in the Garden. Playing the devil's part on such occasions is a renegade scholar and witty sponger named Parlabane ("well spoken," from the French), who, to the discomfiture of Spook, has suddenly imposed himself upon its charity. Parlabane's innuendoes, sly insights and outright extortion particularly trouble Simon Darcourt, the ascetic medievalist Clement Hollier and Hollier's beautiful graduate student, Maria Magdalena Theotoky ("God-bringer," from the Greek). It is Maria's soul that lies chiefly at risk, for she is in love with Hollier and in flight from her immigrant, gypsy origins. Less naïve than Eve or Faust's Gretchen, however, she ultimately beats the devil at his own game by accepting that her "roots" extend as far into the earth as her "crown" rises into the rarefied air of scholarship.

By the end of the novel, Maria's passion for Hollier has become a passionate regard: she envisions him among "the Rebel Angels" who, according to an apocryphal text, brought the secrets of God to mankind. Her wise acceptance of the past as living in the present reiterates a central theme of the novel: each mind is less "its own place" than an accumulation of all places achieved by all minds during the evolution of human culture. In showing how Maria

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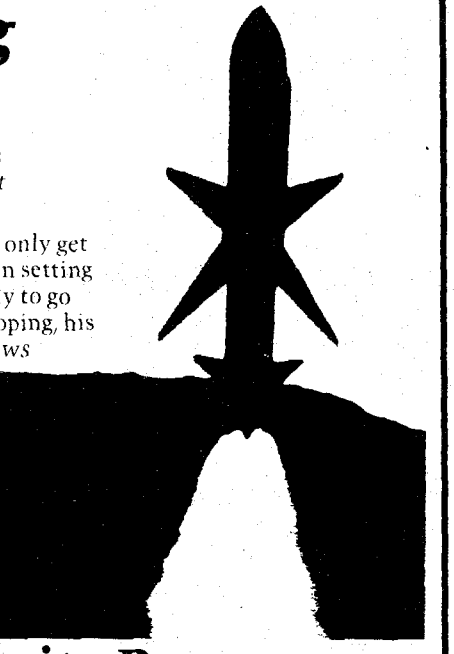

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and her fellow scholars explore bygone mental territory—apocrypha, Gnostic doctrine, gypsy lore—Davies manages a touch both light and learned. It is our loss, therefore, that so often he leaves off showing, in order to intone, the virtues of cultural recall.

If Davies mars his novel by underscoring its meaning, Joy Williams achieves an effect more devastating and far subtler: *Taking Care*, story by story and incident by incident, withdraws meaning from the lives it represents. In each case, what remains is a gem of despair, worked into the shape of finality by skillful sleights of hand.

Williams's characters usually live in the suburbs or the small coastal towns of Florida and New England. They are divorced or remarried, in their mid 20s or 30s, the parents of small children. There are exceptions; for instance, children are the protagonists in two tales, and the title story tells of an elderly minister caring for his deserted grandchild and dying wife. On the whole, though, Williams focuses on ordinary moments in familiar lives. Ordinary moments, as she conceives them, are the most vulnerable to horror: in "Woods," the wife of a newscaster becomes suddenly afraid to look down at her body, "because she thought that if she did, she would find something missing, a breast, a hand, a sneaker"; in "The Lover," a young mother arrives to pick up her child at nursery school only to discover that she cannot differentiate among the children, "all small, quizzical creatures, holding pieces of wooden puzzles in their hands." Both women have arrived at an intersection of horror, madness and the commonplace. But what has brought them there?

In prose as coldly intense as fluorescent lighting, Williams displays the wares of everyday life, a collection of objects that in the aggregate exert pressure on her characters, urging them toward madness. Her inventory includes a Mercedes, "elegant and disheartening"; radio talk shows and cherries jubilee; "machines dispensing tuna sandwiches, combs, coffee and nylon stockings"; and the TV, clamoring *Sesame Street*. Williams's men and women find themselves suddenly stranded in the surreal, like shoppers in a no-exit supermarket. And the goods banked up in aisles around them have their own frightening, inhuman order—an order that trivializes human experience. "'In this world there is a postcard of everything,'" says one life-weary adult to his child's best friend, "'That's the kind of world this is.'"

At times it seems that madness will culminate in a superb sanity; that is, by negation, the lives of Williams's characters will define some essential good missing from a world encumbered with goods. Regrettably, Williams uses her narrative skill to another end, to make all sources of suffering appear equally mysterious and all sources of reparation equally futile. For example, in *Taking Care*, ties of familiarity or family are as easily slipped as knots tied in butter. (One young woman dismisses her lover with the note, "My ego is too healthy for real involvement with you. I don't like you. Good-bye.") In Williams's world, the cruelties of contemporary folkways ultimately have no more pattern than mechanical or natural disasters—death by automobile, heart failure or anaphylactic shock. All losses are equally disrupting and equally random.

One of Williams's characters, Jenny, a small child haunted by visions, announces to her nursery school teacher that "the crayons are dead, the swings are dead." For her, a private debate with pain leads to compelling equations that nonetheless falsify reality. Jenny says

> that she has no toys, that she lives with machinery she cannot run, that she lives in a house with no windows, no view of the street, that she lives with strangers.

Jenny shares her conclusion of victimization with other central characters in *Taking Care* and her method of deriving it with Williams herself—for not only character but author deny the consoling possibilities of home and work, solitude and company, family and friends. Perhaps, also like Jenny, Joy Williams conducts a private debate in which the satisfaction of balancing arguments at zero exceeds the pleasure of arriving at certain sums. In any event, the result of her imagining is a world brilliantly rendered and simultaneously nullified—without doubt "its own place." □

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On the One Hand . . .

RICHARD GILMAN

HEADBIRTHS, or, The Germans Are Dying Out. *By Günter Grass. Translated by Ralph Mannheim. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 136 pp. $9.95.*

Famous writers tend to become institutions, or rather to institutionalize themselves. As designated seers or gadflies, they take on the burden of everyone else's conscience and poke around in all sorts of public business. Tolstoy ended as a writer of this kind; Camus, more subtly and gracefully, was one; Norman Mailer works hard at it. Today there is no writer more swollen with self-importance or, if that's too harsh, more convinced of his responsibility for the whole of his culture than Günter Grass, who has begun to think of himself as identical with the fates of German literature, German politics and German mores.

As his prophet's beard grows longer, Grass becomes duller, quirkier and more self-indulgent. Although it had its admirers, *The Flounder* seemed to me excruciatingly boring and inflated, a gigantic conceit that fell flat as a, well, as a flounder. *The Meeting at Teltge* no doubt interested some inner circles of German literary life, but to an American reader it seemed runic and irremediably arch. Now Grass's latest book has been translated into English. Once again I can imagine its appeal to his zealous adherents at home, but it doesn't travel well.

Headbirths, whose subtitle is *The Germans Are Dying Out* (an echo of Peter Handke's play about capitalism, *They Are Dying Out*), is an exceedingly odd book—short, haphazard, erratic in theme and tone; it suggests something thrown together between blockbusters, just to keep the old hand in. Superficial-

Richard Gilman is The Nation*'s drama critic.*

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ly, it has to do with a trip Grass and his wife took to China and India in 1979 with Volker Schlöndorff, the director of the film version of *The Tin Drum*. The trip was sponsored by the Goethe Institutes, which send German intellectuals to read and lecture abroad, and Grass and Schlöndorff used the occasion to plan a movie about a young German couple, both schoolteachers, who make roughly the same trip in the interest of "broadening" their sense of the underdeveloped world.

Grass's invented couple, two of his "headbirths," came of age in the 1960s, members of "a generation that had committed itself to the principle of refusal: resolved to throw off all sexual and social restraints." But since that time "they have found themselves knee-deep in prosperity-determined consumerism and pleasureless sex," so that, Grass implies, all that's left to them are the rhetoric and empty gestures of liberalism. In their ambivalence about having a child—"yes to baby/no to baby" is the way Grass describes it—they represent, literally, the sterility of liberalism or rather, since Grass himself is a supporter of Willy Brandt's leftist faction of the Social Democratic Party, the sterility of the fashionable, intellectually pretentious liberalism of Helmut Schmidt's ruling coalition.

Grass uses the couple and the projected movie as pretexts for a wide, rambling, unwitty, at times nearly incoherent attack on a great many things German. He hates the new interest in "culture" and religion. The Germans, he writes, "rummage about for spiritual values which, to exclude intellectual refinements, they call fundamental values. Ethical concepts on clearance. Every day a new idea of Christ is thrown on the market. Culture is in. Readings, lectures, exhibitions are taken by storm. Perpetual theater festivals. Music ad nauseam. Like a drowning man, the citizen grasps at books."

Well, here's another book for him to grasp at. It is a little graceless for this writer who has been piling things onto the culture to complain now that there's too much of it. But Grass has become so much an institution that he operates on automatic pilot. The "headbirths" keep coming: literary notions, extra-literary notions, political critiques, social cavils, proposals of every kind. Imagining himself as dictator, Grass only half-humorously calls for abolishing compulsory education in favor of "itinerant tutors," relieving "the energy problem by . . . cutting all electric current at night" and easing tension between the two Germanys by having them "exchange their systems every ten years." And he goes on railing at his fellow Germans, who "always insist on being terrifyingly more or pathetically less than they are. They can't leave anything alone. On their chopping block everything gets split."

Occasionally Grass shows an awareness of how unproductively irritating he can be, as in the section where he defends his literary career while at the same time acknowledging some of its peculiarities. And there are a few moments of genuine feeling, in particular his mourning the death of a friend, the writer Nicolas Born, who died at 45 just after Grass's return to Germany. But the lofty, hectoring tone predominates. And what are we to do with a passage like this: "good old

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capitalism and good old communism . . . thanks to their tried and true enmity, they are becoming . . . more and more alike; two evil old men whom we have to love because the love they offer us refuses to be snubbed"? Strained, unfunny, the passage is a typical "headbirth," advancing neither the cause of literature nor that of political understanding. □

Liner Notes

PAUL BUHLE

Read the prophets in the Bible, insists Iowa preacher Gil Dawes, and you discover that Moses was a militant labor leader and Jesus a worker who met his earthly fate for challenging business, the church and the state. This is a long way from Jerry Falwell's claim of Biblical authority for the capitalist ethic. But the two viewpoints are obliquely related: the breakdown of mainstream religious consensus has opened up space to both the religious right and the religious left. Of course, the Moral Majority gets the media attention. A few years back, when Dawes first gave his talk to striking grain millers in Clinton, Iowa, he was practically alone in his socialistic boldness. Today, with the clergy lining up against nuclear arms and budget cutbacks, he has become the grainy polemicist for a growing movement. *Let My People Go* (75¢, Christians for Socialism, 3540 14th Street, Detroit, Mich. 48202) reads a lot like those nineteenth-century labor tracts that assailed the Carnegies as Herods and claimed that the mantle of "our Carpenter Comrade" fitted properly around the Knights of Labor.

Still, the reappearance of church radicalism in down-home WASP territory is something new, and so is its spokesman. Son of a Methodist minister, Dawes did his mission work in Central America and returned to thump the Workers' Gospel. He tells his listeners to demand that their ministers get off the fence. Above all, he gives us a vision of an emerging religious culture that is not merely humanitarian in spirit but self-affirming, one capable of awakening souls from what William Appleman Williams has called our nation's Great Evasion. That is: our need to go beyond free market ideals to a cooperative American commonwealth.

Dawes's cosmopolitian counterpart is Dorothy Sölle, an outstanding Christian thinker and certainly the finest feminist poet that present-day church ranks have thus far yielded. Leader of the German Christian Socialists, she has a Hegelian taste for working out theological dilemmas in dialectics. *Beyond Mere Dialogue: On Being Christian and Socialist* ($2, Christians for Socialism) tells her own story as a Christian, a feminist and a political militant, and in so doing makes a powerful argument for an earthly, even sensual liberation. "The contrary to sin is not being pure and stainless," she says. "Faith doesn't mean the enduring of self-alienation. Faith is aimed at its transcendence."

Sometimes, in her poetic way, Sölle seems to take us out of the world almost entirely, toward a "new lifestyle lived in the islands of resurrection." The specifics have a twentieth-century flavor. But as an emerging scholarship by writers such as Elaine Pagels and Joseph Jablonski abundantly demonstrates, the central vision runs in a straight line from the Gnostics to the medieval Free Spirits, the French Camisards and the American Shakers. Ecstatic rebels, feminists and communards, they have never won. But the renewal of their traditions is a sure sign that great forces, millenarian symptoms, are once more afoot.

No one is better attuned to the millenarian symptoms than the religious jokesters at the Church of the Sub-Genius ($10 for membership and Minister's Certificate, P.O. Box 140306, Dallas, Tex. 75214), whose stated method is "The Unmasking of False Prophets" and whose motto reads, "Fuck 'em If They Can't Take a Joke." Heresy? Right-wing evangelists should think so. Sub-Genius pamphlets, broadsides and especially their occasional magazine, *The Stark Fist of Removal*, take apart Falwellism in the most effective way possible, by enshrining paranoia in a colossal conspiracy which includes everything from "Bolshevik clones in government" to U.F.O.s and Big Foot. Does Falwell's *Listen, America!* call for the Man on Horseback? The Texas maniacs have

Paul Buhle recently retired for a second time from publishing left magazines.

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discovered the logical candidate in the larger-than-life J.R. "Bob" Dobbs, "Saint of Sales," huckster and deity wrapped up together. Dobbs reveals new sacred messages in his "Prescriptures," such as "know that as many as I rewardeth and bribe with the drunkenness of faith, I torment and rebuke; be zealous therefore, and fanatical in thy madness of These the End Times, the Time and a Half Time." The Sub-Genius underlings translate this message for us: "I can really kick ass. If you do what I say, I'll give you Slack and Special Foods. Watch TV, break your chromosomes, mutate and . . . have even weirder kids!" It sounds like the Moral Majority's Jehovah on LSD with touches of both *Saturday Night Live* (which has recently made a few open references to "Bob") and the Sub-Geniuses' most devoted celebrity followers, Ohio punks DEVO.

Proof of a different kind of revival, the small press is now passing from the gloomy years of rising prices and reader indifference to new and unpredictable flowerings. Typesetting, printing and mailing costs haven't fallen. But readers and publishers are showing new verve. And that's good news for anybody with an unblinkered mind. □

FILMS.

ROBERT HATCH

Diner
Some Kind of Hero

Barry Levinson's *Diner* slipped into New York City when no one was looking and set the reviewers to dancing jigs of happy surprise. And quite right: it is a small, well-written, splendidly acted, altogether first-rate picture. Like *American Graffiti*, perhaps still closer in mood to Fellini's *I Vitelloni*, it is less concerned with telling a story than with recording a rite of passage. All three films gaze with ironic affection on the antics of youths who have outgrown the teen-age nursery and yet are less than eager to press their claims to maturity. In this interval of panic, they hang out together, looking large and clumsy. They nudge one another as the girls pass by; they laugh too often and too loudly and get into scrapes that can no longer be passed off as childish. Most of us can remember that we did somehow manage

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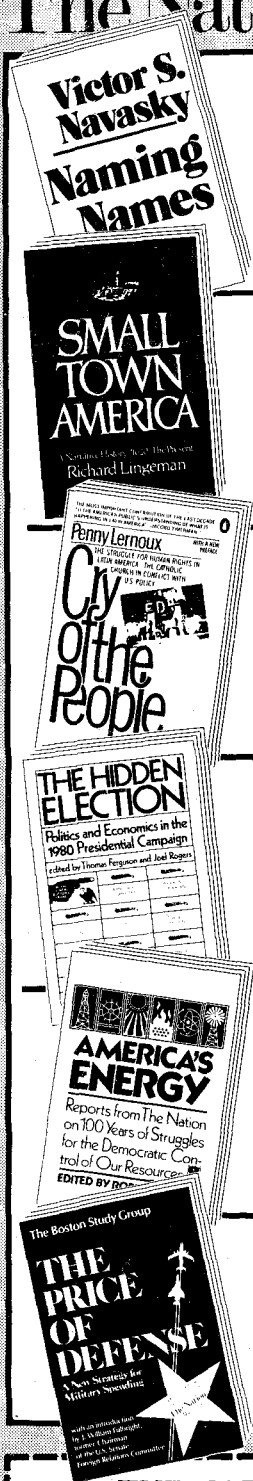
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to get across that street and are disposed to deal generously with those still teetering on the curb.

We are certain to do so when, as with Levinson's crowd, the oafs show some native wit and budding promise. The last stage of adolescence is apt to be marked by heavy resort to pranks and kidding, but no crowd I ran with, and none I've observed since, tossed one-liners around with the sharp efficiency of these late-1950s natives of Baltimore. That was where and when Levinson came of age, and I would bet that he enjoyed a considerable reputation for repartee.

With little formal plot, the picture nevertheless maintains a steady pressure of suspense. It is caused by the tendency of these hulking Peter Pans to play games that could at any moment turn out to be not so funny. Only gradually, as you come to know them better, do you see how the cruelty of their late childhood is giving way to an appreciation of cause and effect. They understand and restrain one another and begin to understand themselves.

What I can't get in focus is *Diner*'s socioeconomic level, perhaps because the film shows very little of where the boys live and keeps their parents almost entirely out of sight. The boys are a couple of years beyond high school, but only one of the five has gone on to college. The brightest and most disenchanted of them—and the one most at risk because he drinks far too much—lives off a trust from his rich grandfather. The least collected, most romantic of the lot is a junior hairdresser, perilously in debt to his bookie. The married one (he finds that the ready availability of sex has deprived him of his hitherto besetting interest and is hurt by his wife's failure to revere his record collection) clerks in a television store. How the other two make ends meet is not disclosed, but they all drive cars and have enough cash for beer, movies and the french fries with gravy that they consume steadily and without apparent distress during all-night bull sessions at the diner. Middle America, I guess.

It is hard to describe the hold these heroes take on a viewer. It comes from the innate sweetness and incipient firmness of their annealing characters. And, of course, because Levinson, who also wrote the script, was part of this life twenty or so years ago and cherishes his memory of how it was. The Baltimore five are played by Steve Guttenberg, Daniel Stern, Mickey Rourke, Kevin Bacon and Timothy Daly. How the film's characters made out we are not told, but the careers of these young actors would seem secure.

Ronald Reagan's solicitude for El Salvador has sharpened the public's memory of Richard Nixon's solicitude for South Vietnam, and *Some Kind of Hero* is thus a timely comedy about the welcome we gave the returning veterans of that degrading war. It is perforce a comedy because it stars Richard Pryor, a reigning comic; and indeed sardonic laughter is the only appropriate response to some of the points the movie wishes to make. Most notably, these satirize television's way with heroes and the Army's way with a prisoner of the Vietcong who, to save a cellmate's life, offended against the dictates of military conduct. One awful moment is the spectacle of Pryor, bewildered and intimidated by the cameras and the microphones, kneeling on brisk instruction from a TV reporter to kiss the ground. Another comes when the so thoughtful and sympathetic Colonel Powers (Ronny Cox) forgets that his charge's name is Eddie and addresses him as "soldier."

But that much granted, I must report that even as a slapstick star vehicle, this one is excessively dumb. It is that antique yarn about the turning worm, about the long-suffering patsy who, having endured a succession of mortifying blows to his pride and person, suddenly seizes fortune by the throat and exits with a beautiful girl at his side and enough money in his pocket to buy the state of Rhode Island. Harold Lloyd rode this old war horse; in fact, he rode it to death. But it was apparently thought that with a bit of scatology and the touching image of dear old paralyzed mom, to say nothing of some stimulating first aid from the classiest hooker in Los Angeles (Margot Kidder), the nag would carry Pryor for another brisk run. And so it may: his charm is boundless and his timing can save the most witless gag. But he deserves better material and so do the hapless veterans of Vietnam. I want to add, as a closing compliment, that though Pryor is black, nowhere in the film does his color have any bearing on what is said or done. In some ways we are growing up.

Some Kind of Hero was directed by Michael Pressman; the screenplay by James Kirkwood and Robert Boris was based on a book by Kirkwood. □

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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1911

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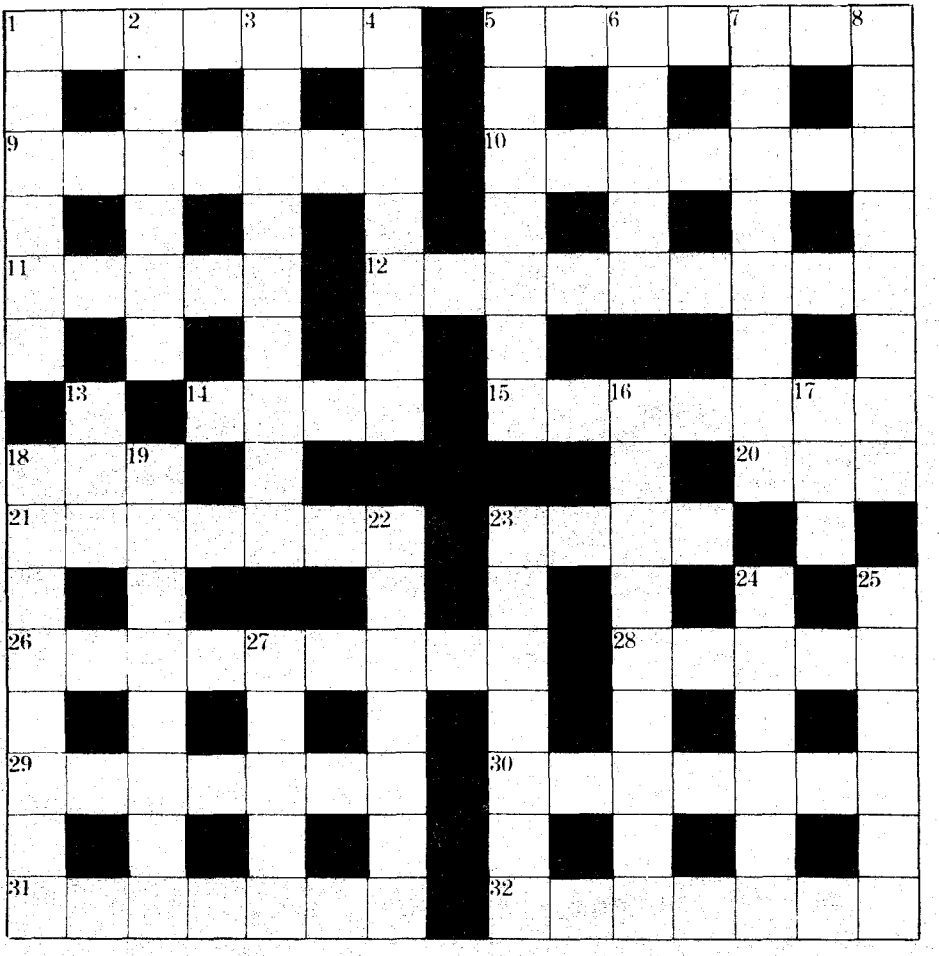
Crossword Puzzle No. 1912

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Cleaning up a sort of 5 across. (7)
5 Starting to understand tiny particles of what elevated rank is supposed to have. (7)
9 Song about a low type of place associated with pastoral simplicity. (7)
10 The home of Tom Water, of Paris. (7)
11 Is it material when the only sort follows one point? (5)
12 A crafty way to color 1 across with ease, by the sound of it. (3-6)
14 and 17 down The sort with a radical in the family? (7)
15 It's a bad thing on a parrot's beak, to be candid. (7)
18 One might find her to be the objective of this. (3)
20 Such a mother might have a number of cubs. (3)
21 More like Maggie's boyfriend thought of being? (You'll never get this!) (7)
23 A seaport in Russia, or in Cuba, Kurdistan, etc. (4)
26 Over the hill? They were once said to go that way here. (Certainly it's not a good place to live.) (9)
28 See 27 down
29 Obsolete instrument, taking the globe and nothing else. (7)
30 Well-known actor—one appearing in the role of *Twist*. (7)
31 The team that takes any sort to look back? (7)
32 When one aloft did land, he was supposed to cry out. (If you see this, you certainly are!) (7)

DOWN

1 and 18 down With which one pours out a community of feeling, in dramatic fashion. (3,3,8)
2 Short transfers. (6)
3 Recess is made obvious in doing so, being sort of indigent around noon. (9)
4 Got something new started in the plant—by less than honest methods? (7)
5 At the end of the year (shortly, that is) a prophet comes up with judicial decisions. (7)
6 In a sense, spoils what might be put on meat, etc. (5)
7 Gave the particulars, being the wrong time to die, confused about the last of the letters. (8)
8 Are they associated with fancy turning? (At least one was, with a spring.) (5,3)
13 How different can the question of identity be? (3)
16 Agreeing to put half a kilo inside? You can expect an incredulous comment. (2,7)
17 See 14 across
18 See 1 down
19 Is one a pure native over there? Mixed, rather! (8)
22 Harsh, but a curious mixture without one. (7)
23 Do they come from Brest? No, not exactly! (7)
24 Unhappy with its organization, one should see a psychiatrist. (6)
25 Caught coming up with a short answer to 17. (6)
27 and 28 across The result of effort by such as Bonheur—like an old streetcar. (5-5)

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